

Evidence-Based Health Care in Pediatrics



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KEYWORDS

- Pediatric nursing care • Evidence-based health care • Systematic reviews
- Evidence implementation

KEY POINTS

- Systematic reviews are regarded as the gold standard of evidence to guide clinical decision making.
- Given the important role that systematic reviews play in influencing the evidence base of our clinical decision making, there are international standards to be followed to ensure the quality and standards in the reporting and publication of systematic reviews.
- The development and dissemination of clinical guidelines to improve the quality of pediatric care is a frequent activity internationally. Ideally, these clinical guidelines draw on the evidence generated from high-quality systematic reviews of both qualitative and quantitative research.

INTRODUCTION

The 2013, volume 48, issue 2 of *Nursing Clinics of North America* provides an overview of evidence-based nursing strategies for children of various ages and diagnoses. Each article reflects a genuine commitment on the investigator's behalf to ensuring that the evidence arising from the best available research informs their systems and processes of care. The issue's editor, Patricia Buckhart, however, encourages the journal's readership to appreciate that more is needed to advance scientifically based interventions for assisting children and their families to successfully manage their health conditions, stating that:

Evidence based health care continues to make important contributions to the well being of children. To ensure the paediatric community can maximize the potential use of these interventions, it is important to ensure that systematic reviews are conducted and reported at the highest possible quality. Such reviews will be of benefit to a broad spectrum of interested stakeholders.¹

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So why are systematic reviews so important? The rigorous methods of synthesis that underpin systematic reviews position them as gold in the health care literature. A well-designed and conducted systematic review provides the reader (typically health care professionals [HCP]) with the critical summary, as encouraged by Archibald Cochrane, of all research (published and unpublished) related to the question of concern.² According to Joanna Briggs Institute,³ the term *evidence* in a systematic review is used to mean “the basis of belief; the substantiation or confirmation that is needed in order to believe that something is true.”^{3(p45)} The evidence presented from a well-conducted systematic review can be used to develop national and/or clinical guidelines that individual organizations can then adapt in the form of clinical pathways, protocols, and policies. Although the Cochrane Collaboration has developed the science and standards associated with systematic reviews on clinical questions about effectiveness, the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI), an associated international collaboration, has established its reputation as a leader in synthesis science for systematic reviews about the feasibility, appropriateness, and meaningfulness of the existing evidence. Increasingly appreciated among HCP is that the evidence arising from systematic reviews focused on these questions are of equal importance to questions about effectiveness as they inform HCP about the evidence base for the various social, cultural, and economic factors that impact and inform the delivery of effective and efficient health care.³

Given the importance of systematic reviews to the HCP, the American-based National Library of Medicine (PubMed) has designed a filter specific for the retrieval of citations indexed as systematic reviews. Using this filter, combined with the search term *pediatrics*, a total of 5340 citations were identified covering the dates from 1967 to October 2013. **Table 1** provides a summary of this search.

Of particular note when reviewing the data presented in **Table 1** is that only 18% of these publications are systematic reviews. The majority are literature reviews, guidelines, or consensus statements from professional societies, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics or the European Society for Pediatrics, and so forth. A total of 14.2% are literature reviews of a clinical question or topic. Sometimes the word *systematic* is still used to describe these literature reviews, which can be misleading to the uninformed reader. Just because a publication uses the term *systematic review* does not mean that it has followed the 7-step process (**Table 2**) of synthesis science upheld by either JBI or Cochrane. Hodson and Craig⁴ emphasize this point in their 2013 publication on systematic reviews of pediatric nephrology with the following statement:

The term “systematic review” does not guarantee that a review covers all the available data, that the validity of included studies has been appropriately assessed, or that data have been combined appropriately in meta-analyses.^{4(p197)}

THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY IN REPORTING AND PUBLISHING SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS

Across all health care specialties, including pediatrics, the number of systematic reviews being published has increased since 1976 with almost an exponential trend. However, the clarity and transparency of these publications is not always optimal. The search methods with regard to the types of databases, additional sources, and the number of databases searched differ widely across systematic reviews. MEDLINE is often the most commonly used database and often the only database searched.

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