

CARESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET NO. 11:

PALLIATIVE CARE PUBMED SEARCH SYNTAX

This technical note is not for the faint hearted! It is a transparent record of how each Palliative Care PubMed Search was created. Using the Dyspnoea PubMed search (restricted to the strongest evidence and free full text articles only) as an example, the exact URL syntax used in the construction of this topic search is included below. A colour key provides a reference point for different components of the search.

An Example Search

Recall from [Technical Notes](#) that Part 1 consists of Concepts, logically represented as Part 1 = (Concept 1 AND Concept 2), where Concept 1 is designed to search for the topic, typically using one or two MeSH terms and Concept 2 is the palliative care filter. Part 2 consists of 3 Concepts, logically represented as Part 2 = (Concept 3 AND Concept 4) NOT Concept 5, where Concept 3 is designed to search for a topic, typically using one or two textwords. Concept 4 is the palliative care filter. Concept 5 is the standard limit for searching only Medline.

Note that all key Boolean operators are in black to highlight the separation of key concepts.

Colour Key

Pink = The phrase that PubMed provides to initiate a real time PubMed search

Light Green = MeSH terms selected for the concept of dyspnoea (Concept 1)

Red = The palliative care filter developed through published research (Concept 2)

Dark Green = Textword search for dyspnoea (Concept 3)

Orange = Modified palliative care filter (Concept 4)

Purple = Exclusion of Medline records (Concept 5)

Light Blue = Restrict to English language (Additional Concept)

Dark Blue = PubMed Clinical Queries filter for systematic reviews/therapy (Additional Concept)

Plum = Restrict to free full text articles only (Additional Concept)

The Search

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Modified Palliative Care PubMed Searches

Some topic searches rely on search terms so integral to palliative care that these terms are already part of the palliative care filter. Examples include: bereavement, advance care planning, and terminal care.

Since these terms are inherently palliative, it follows that they need not be combined with the palliative care filter to efficiently retrieve articles within the palliative care context. In such cases, the single search term alone constitutes the Palliative Care PubMed search. We have called this a “sensitive” topic search as it locates *everything* on the topic within the database, without concern for a specific context.

However, it may still be useful to restrict such a search to a narrower context. For example, you may want to find articles on advance care planning but only in association with the concept of bereavement. The search pages for these topics therefore offers a more “specific search”, which is the relevant concept combined with a modified version of the palliative care filter. This modification is essentially the removal of the term to be searched from its instance within the palliative care filter. This is a necessary change as Boolean logic does not allow a concept to be combined with itself using the AND operator.

To illustrate why this modification to the palliative care filter is necessary, consider the following:

Advance care planning AND (Advance care planning OR Attitude to death OR Bereavement OR Terminal care etc.)

Green = the MeSH term for the concept advance care planning

Red = the palliative care filter (shortened for simplicity)

The palliative care filter part in red asks PubMed to retrieve all records on either Advance care planning OR Attitude to death OR Bereavement OR Terminal care. This results in a very large pooled set of records. However, if you then combine this large set with Advance care planning using AND, you are asking PubMed to retrieve only the *portion* of the large set that is on the topic of Advance care planning. In Boolean logic terms, this is the same as searching Advance care planning on its own. All other terms in the palliative care filter part of the search are made redundant. Simply by removing Advance care planning from within the bracketed set, you reinstate the palliative care filter and retrieve records where Advance care planning occurs in combination with at least one other term from the filter.

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