

WHAT IS A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW?

When you are looking for clinical studies you can often find a large number of papers. It can be hard to know which ones are best or how many you need to read. Review articles are useful because they summarise a number of studies and papers.

Systematic reviews are a type of review that explicitly describes the process by which studies are identified and combined. They outline the types of studies included, the search terms used in their literature search and how data is analysed. Some systematic reviews present their findings in a narrative form. Others use a statistical method called meta-analysis to combine and report the results of individual studies.

Often groups developing clinical guidelines will start their work with a systematic review to ensure they have all the relevant research evidence to inform the development of the guidelines.

Sometimes systematic reviews will report that the authors couldn't find any relevant studies or that there were not enough quality studies to answer the review question. While this can be disappointing for people seeking help now, it may also encourage new research studies to answer these questions.

Where to find systematic reviews

You can use the Find Systematic Reviews box in the [Clinical Queries](#) page of PubMed.

The Cochrane Collaboration maintains a library of systematic reviews that follow their specific review methodology. They have a set of reviews dealing with [Pain, Palliative and Supportive Care](#).

The [Joanna Briggs Institute](#) also houses a number of reviews on topics of clinical importance. Many of these reviews have been developed by nurses and allied health professionals.

The [CareSearch Review Collection](#) provides citation details on reviews for over seventy palliative care topics such as pain, dysphagia and spirituality. They have been sourced from four bibliographic databases - CINAHL, Medline, Embase and PsycINFO.

Finding out more

Oxford University's Bandolier website produces evidence based information on healthcare. It produced a document [What is a systematic review?](#)

The EPPI Centre outlines six reasons for systematic reviews in their webpage [Why is it important to be systematic?](#)

CareSearch is an online resource funded by the Department of Health and Ageing to help clinicians find relevant evidence about palliative care. Available now at www.caresearch.com.au