



Choosing the right resource: Literature and evidence databases on CareSearch

Tieman JJ, Rawlings D

Palliative and Supportive Services, Flinders University, South Australia

Introduction

Evidence has become a very important and widely used term. Professionals are urged to develop evidence-based practice to ensure that patients receive the most proven and best quality care.

Evidence-based practice looks at integrating the providers' clinical expertise with the best evidence from research and clinical studies and the patient's own preferences. [1]



Well conducted research studies should provide palliative care's evidence base. As a multidisciplinary field of practice, research in palliative care incorporates many methodological approaches and diverse study designs. The selected study design must, however, be able to answer the research question that is being posed.

Typically, research findings are published in journals and form part of the literature resources for palliative care education and practice. It is therefore important that health professionals are able to access these literature resources if they are to integrate new evidence into their practice.

Information needs

Health professionals seek evidence and information for many different reasons. [2] They may need immediate information on a particular condition or symptom to provide direct clinical care. They may want to learn about new treatments and therapies or just want to keep up to date with the latest research. Clinicians may be taking part in further education or continuing professional development activities and need relevant resources.

Sometimes a single article will be sufficient while for other purposes it may be important to make sure that all relevant evidence is found.

With the advent of the internet and new technologies, information dissemination and information seeking have become an increasingly important part of health practice.

Searching for evidence

The literature and evidence base for palliative care is a diffuse and complex literature to search comprehensively. [3, 4] Some issues in retrieving palliative care literature are described below:

Rapidly expanding

Numbers of palliative care articles and clinical trials are increasing rapidly in the literature. In 2005 alone, 1,985 journals published 6,983 palliative care articles.

Indexing

Not all journals are indexed. This means relevant published literature may not be retrieved by a search. Further, unique literature can be found on various bibliographic databases.

Unpublished material

Not all research studies are published in journals. The findings might have been presented as a report or thesis.

Work in progress

Sometimes being aware that research on a particular issue is currently underway is important. For example, it may inform planning for other research work.

Search strategies

Searching for palliative care literature can be difficult. No single MeSH term or textword retrieves all relevant items.

CareSearch has developed strategies to comprehensively harvest the palliative care literature and make it available to the clinical community.

CareSearch resources

Clinical Practice pages:

These pages are an overview of the known evidence from an examination of systematic reviews on the topic. Each page provides an overview, links to a full text article and information on active areas of research. Each page is supported by its own PubMed Topic Search to enable further engagement with the published literature.

Accessing the published literature

The following CareSearch resources enable users to look for information and evidence published in journals and indexed in a bibliographic database.

CareSearch Review Collection

This citation collection of systematic reviews and structured literature reviews are harvested from Ovid Medline, CINAHL, PsycINFO and Embase. To be included a review needs a described search strategy and a described mechanism for data synthesis.

PubMed Topic Searches

These searches provide users with instant access to the most current literature on one of fifty palliative care topics. They are built using the palliative care filter and an expert topic search. When the topic is selected, the search is uploaded into the PubMed database to automatically retrieve relevant citations. PubMed is used as this database is publicly available.

Create your own PubMed Search Topic

If you have a topic of interest and there is not a CareSearch PubMed Search Topic, you can "Create your own PubMed Topic Search" using a preloaded version of the palliative care filter.

Not published, not indexed, in progress

Not all literature and evidence is found in journal articles. The best available evidence, or evidence about Australian issues, may need to be found from other sources such as:

CareSearch Grey Literature

This database holds Australian content only. Four sets of items are collected - conference abstracts; theses; non-indexed journal articles; other grey literature. It is valuable when other evidence doesn't exist or if there is a need to understand local issues or contexts. Quality of items may vary and hence critical appraisal is important.

Research Studies Register

This collection holds details on current and completed Australian research projects in palliative care. It enables information on research work to be shared among clinicians, researchers and policy makers.

National Palliative Care Program Projects

This section of the website has compiled the various projects that have been undertaken as part of the National Palliative Care Program. It provides details on ongoing and completed work. They can provide specific details on local contexts and specific populations.

Conclusion

Finding literature and evidence to meet information in palliative care can be challenging. Understanding the types of content, databases and tools held in the CareSearch website can make searching for and finding needed information easier.

References

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For further information: Jennifer.Tieman@flinders.edu.au

Looking for dyspnoea information

We can use an example to see how to use CareSearch's resources. Imagine you have a patient with severe dyspnoea.

The steps below outline an approach to finding relevant resources in CareSearch. The step sequence will retrieve the strongest, summarised evidence first and then move to other types of information and evidence resources.

Step 1: Is there a Clinical Practice page?



Step 2: Are there systematic reviews in the area?



Step 3: Is there a PubMed Topic Search on dyspnoea?



Step 4: Is the grey literature important?



Step 5: Do I need to know about current local research?



Step 6: I still need more information.

You can use the Finding Evidence section's Learning to search or Create your own PubMed Topic Search.



There are many information and evidence resources in CareSearch relating to dyspnoea. Following a structured approach to finding the most relevant resources will make locating these resources easier and quicker.

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2. CareSearch is managed by the Department of Palliative and Supportive Services, Flinders University.

