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 unpublished material
Not all research studies are published in journals. 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 topics 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.

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.

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

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