

Reviews

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As we draw to the end of another year reflecting on the past year and looking to the future is a common pastime for editors. This year we have again published commentaries on a wide range of topics (see the Questions and Answers from this volume on page 123). The vast majority of these have been based on systematic reviews. It is encouraging to see the numbers of these increasing. In 2009 I noted¹ that we had seen a 44% increase in the number of potential reviews identified by our searches since 1998, and we have seen a further 17% increase in the past two years.

While these increases are welcome there is still a great deal of variation in the quality of the reviews that are being published. As a regular reader of reviews both for this journal and the Dental Elf blog (www.thedentalelf.net/) it is frustrating to find reviews described as systematic when they fail to meet some of the basic methodological quality criteria outlined in the AMSTAR tool.² While the methodology for systematic reviewing has been developing and improving for the past two decades the core methodology has been readily accessible for much of that time through the excellent Cochrane Handbook (www.cochrane-handbook.org) and the University of York's Centre for Reviews and Dissemination's guidelines for systematic reviewing (www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/index_guidance.htm). In addition to these freely available tools the Equator Network provides excellent guidance for reporting a wide range of study designs including systematic reviews (www.equator-network.org/resource-centre/library-of-health-research-reporting/reporting-guidelines/systematic-reviews-and-meta-analysis/).

In addition to the increase in the overall number of systematic reviews being conducted, increasingly reviews that are addressing a very similar or even the same question are being produced. Cochrane reviews follow a clear process and so protocols for

Table 1. Journals monitored for EBD using RSS feeds

American Journal of Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics	Archives of Oral Biology
Australian Dental Journal	BMC Oral Health
British Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery	Caries Research
Clinical Oral Implants Research	Community Dentistry and Oral Epidemiology
European Journal of Orthodontics	European Journal of Dental Education
Gerodontology	International Endodontic Journal
International Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery	International Journal of Oral Science
International Journal of Paediatric Dentistry	Journal of Clinical Periodontology
Journal of Craniomaxillofacial Surgery	Journal of Dental Research
Journal of Dentistry	Journal of Dentistry for Children
Journal of Endodontics	Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery
Journal of Oral Pathology and Medicine	Journal of Orthodontics
Journal of Periodontal Research	Journal of Periodontology
Journal of Prosthodontics	Journal of Public Health Dentistry
Journal of the Canadian Dental Association	Journal of Oral Rehabilitation
Oral Surgery, Oral Medicine, Oral Pathology, Oral Radiology	International Journal of Prosthodontics

their reviews are published on the Cochrane Library following peer review. Other reviews do not undergo this process, although good review methodology would involve the development of an a priori protocol. For non-Cochrane reviews the University of York does provide a facility to register review protocols, the PROSPERO database (<http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/>). As systematic reviews can be significant undertakings, checking both the Cochrane Library and the PROSPERO database to avoid duplicating on-going work seems worthwhile.

This year has seen increased calls for the release of data by pharmaceutical companies. While this call for the release of data from primary studies is welcome and long overdue, should we also be calling for greater release of data abstracted from systematic reviews, particularly ones that receive significant government funding? Extracting data from primary studies is a

time-consuming element of the systematic review process so should we be looking at doing it just once but doing it really well so that the data abstraction could be made available to other users?

Another minor change to the journals process we have made this year as a result of involvement with the Dental Elf has been the increasing use of RSS feeds to monitor new publications from a range journals. This RSS feed monitoring is in addition to our regular searches of Medline. The journals we regularly monitor are shown in Table 1.

1. Richards D. New readers start here. *Evid Based Dent* 2009; **10**: 34.
2. Shea BJ, Grimshaw JM, Wells GA. Development of AMSTAR: a measurement tool to assess the methodological quality of systematic reviews. *BMC Med Res Methodol* 2007; **7**: 10.

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