

ISSG structured abstract for:

Wong SS, Wilczynski NL, Haynes RB. Optimal search strategies for qualitative studies in MEDLINE. *Medinfo* 2004;11(1):311-6.

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Objective:

This filter is designed to identify qualitative research in MEDLINE.

Methods:

The authors identified a gold standard (GS) of 366 records by hand searching 161 core health care journals in 2000. 60% of the GS was used to derive the filters and the remaining 40% was used to validate the filters. The search terms for the filters were collected from consulting widely with experts, and from relevant records.

Results:

Several filters are offered. In the validation set the most sensitive filter scored 92.47%, the most precise scored 39.59%, the most specific scored 99.36% and the best compromise between sensitivity and specificity scored 86.99% sensitivity and 92% specificity (7.53% precision). The authors reported that the differences in performance between the development and validation sets were not statistically significant.

Discussion:

The authors note that, unlike their other filters, the records were not assessed for methodological quality, and that further testing of the filters is required to provide more performance data.

ISSG commentary:

The scale of the hand search is impressive, but the focus on one year may affect the future currency of the filter, especially if the authors' desired changes to reporting and indexing of qualitative research are realised. More detail of the number of qualitative terms tested and test methods would have been helpful.