Beyond Clinical Effectiveness - the Role of the NHS Economic Evaluation Database in Providing Best Evidence for Health Care

Bouyka Sloykova1, John Nixon2, Julie Ganville3, Jimmy Christie4, Mike Drummond4, Jos Kleijnen1

1. Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, University of York, York YO10 5DD, UK 2. Centre for Health Economics, University of York, York YO10 5DD, UK

INTRODUCTION

In a world of unlimited resources medical practice would be based on evidence of effectiveness only. In the real world, decision makers have the difficult task to decide how to allocate scarce health care resources among different uses. Economic analysis aims at identifying and making explicit the criteria used in this process. Economic evaluations of health care interventions identify, measure, value and compare the costs and consequences of alternatives under consideration.

The characteristics of full economic evaluations of health care interventions are:

1. Identifying relevant papers.
2. Classifying them according to existing inclusion/exclusion criteria.
3. Writing critical abstracts following a set of predefined guidelines.
4. Identifying relevant papers.

Weeky searches of Current Contents-Clinical Medicine are conducted along with hand searches of a range of journals and grey literature sources. Medline and the Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) are searched on a monthly basis.

2. Classifying papers.

Using a set of inclusion/exclusion criteria (See table 2) all identified papers are either rejected or pass to a further assessment stage. However, studies are not selected for inclusion on the basis of their quality; the experts are writing abstracts. A strict process of quality control ensures that the abstracts are accurate, comprehensive and clear.

B. THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE ECONOMIC EVALUATION DATABASE (NHS EED)

The NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination at the University of York, UK, has been commissioned by the UK Department of Health to develop and maintain a database of structured critical abstracts of full economic evaluations of health care.

The goal of the NHS EED Project is to provide a high quality product which is ensured by:

- selecting as many relevant published papers as resources allow,
- classifying them according to existing inclusion/exclusion criteria,
- writing critical abstracts following a set of predefined guidelines,
- identifying relevant papers.

Weekly searches of Current Contents-Clinical Medicine are conducted along with hand searches of a range of journals and grey literature sources. Medline and the Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) are searched on a monthly basis.

3. Writing critical abstracts.

Papers reporting a full economic evaluation of a health intervention are selected to health care commissioners by the project to write critical abstracts. A strict process of control quality is that the abstracts are accurate, comprehensive and clear.

The NHS Economic Evaluation Database has a content-oriented, structured abstracts of full economic evaluations of health interventions, as well as reviews of effectiveness decision making, together with information about the cost-effectiveness studies published in the UK.

C. CONTENTS OF STRUCTURED ABSTRACTS ON THE NHS EED

Abstracts are written following a set of guidelines, compiled with the assistance of an international panel of experts. The aim is to provide a structured, critical summary of the study to facilitate the understanding of the methods used by the authors as well as to assess the quality of the study. The format allows comparison across studies and is designed to provide the target audience (health care professionals, managers, policy-makers, researchers and academics) with accessible and comprehensive information (See table 3).

The economic evaluations included as abstracts on the database are typically from the USA or Canada (52.5%), and the UK (12.2%) is also included in a secondary care setting (22.8%). In a recent review of the database it was found that the most preferred type of economic analysis is cost-effectiveness analysis, followed by cost-utility analysis, while benefit-studies are very rare.

The Cochrane Collaboration is the leading international organisation dedicated to making health care decisions based on evidence. The Cochrane Collaboration is a not-for-profit, global, free-access, independent network of healthcare professionals, researchers and patients.”

CONCLUSION

The database is a powerful tool for decision-making as it provides easily accessible information about the cost-effectiveness of health interventions as well as assessments of the quality of the studies. As part of the Cochrane Library the database could be the way out of the information labyrinth towards better access to evidence and evidence-based health care.