Defining your question: PICO and PS

A summary of

How to cite this NCCMT summary:

Relevance For Public Health
This tool can be used to develop searchable questions as the first step in using research evidence to inform decision making. The tool documents search terms to examine the context around an issue and interventions to address the problem.

Description
This tool, Developing an Efficient Search Strategy using PICO, was created by Health Evidence. It helps users to develop a searchable question, which is a fundamental step in using research evidence to inform decision making. This fillable form helps users articulate a searchable question and document search terms for a search strategy.

This tool helps users define questions for quantitative research (PICO) and qualitative research (PS). The PICO format creates searchable questions that address issues of intervention effectiveness or clinical questions, while the PS format examines questions related to understanding how and why the issue exists. Creating searchable questions involves identifying key words and search terms according to:

- **PICO**: Population, Intervention or Exposure (PECO), Comparison, Outcomes; or
- **PS**: Population, Situation.

To learn more about PICO and PS, see NCCMT's online learning module, Introduction to Evidence-Informed Decision Making and Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine. To learn more about defining your question, see the webcast, Define. There is evidence that using PICO to create a searchable question retrieves more relevant citations than using a standard database interface alone (Schartd et al., 2007).

This tool consists of two parts:

- **PICO Search Terms Table**: For Searchable Quantitative Research Questions
- **PS Search Terms Table**: For Searchable Qualitative Research Questions

Users can access this tool along with other resources to support the use of research, such as checklists and flowcharts, from Health Evidence at Tools to support evidence-informed decision making.

Implementing the Tool

Who is Involved?
Librarians, project specialists, consultants and others involved in creating search strategies would use this resource.

Steps for Using Tool
The tool, Developing an Efficient Search Strategy using PICO, consists of a table for PICO and one for PS. Each table is a fillable form that provides an example from a clinical question and prompts users to document synonyms or key words and MeSH headings (Medical Subject Headings).

To learn more about MeSH headings, see the U.S. National Library of Medicine.
Evaluation and Measurement Characteristics

Evaluation
Has not been evaluated

Validity
Not applicable

Reliability
Not applicable

Methodological Rating
Unknown/No evidence

Tool Development

Developers
Health Evidence
Website: www.healthevidence.org

Method of Development
Information not available

Release Date
2009

Contact Person
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Resources

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<tr>
<th>Title of Primary Resource</th>
<th>Developing an Efficient Search Strategy using PICO</th>
</tr>
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<td>Type of Material</td>
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<td>Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conditions for Use</td>
<td>Requirements for adapting this tool include: Health Evidence is acknowledged for tool development; adapted tool cannot be used for profit (not to be sold).</td>
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These summaries are written by the NCCMT to condense and to provide an overview of the resources listed in the Registry of Methods and Tools and to give suggestions for their use in a public health context. For more information on individual methods and tools included in the review, please consult the authors/developers of the original resources.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title of Supplementary Resource</strong></th>
<th>Utilization of the PICO framework to improve searching PubMed for clinical questions.</th>
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<td>Copyright © 2007 Schardt et al; licensee BioMed Central Ltd.</td>
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