Meta-Analysis & Systematic Reviews

Authors of these studies systematically identify, select, evaluate, and synthesize all high quality research evidence (RCTs) relevant to a question in order to answer it. Look for words like ‘meta-analysis,’ or ‘systematic review.’ The article should be 10 or more pages.

Evidence-Based Practice Guideline

Guidelines provide a summary of the relevant medical literature. Professional societies develop guidelines to aid clinicians in choosing diagnostic tests, treatments for specific conditions, etc. Look for 10 or more authors, and ‘practice guideline’ in the title of the article.

Randomized Controlled Trials

A scientific experiment where patients are divided into two groups. One group receives treatment, and the other receives a placebo. Look for a methods section in the article’s headings, and words like ‘randomized,’ and ‘placebo.’

Cohort Studies

An observational study where patients are followed over time to investigate causes of disease and to establish risk factors or health outcomes. Look for ‘cohort,’ or a group studied over a number of years and a section heading called ‘methods.’

Case Studies & Individual Case Reports

Studies that report in-depth on a patient or group of patients with the same, rare disease. Look for words like ‘case report,’ or ‘case study.’

Expert Opinion, Review Articles, & Textbooks

No empirical evidence is provided. A group of experts provide recommendations based on experience and authoritative sources. Look for words like ‘review’ or authors summarizing other articles. No methods section!

Animal & Laboratory Research

Researchers perform experiments on cell cultures, tissue, and animals to find treatments for human disease. Look for words like ‘rats,’ ‘mice,’ with ‘experiment,’ and a section heading called ‘methods.’

Anecdotal Evidence

Narrative information about a real person or incident. A story or recounting of an event. Not a formal article.