

HOW TO OBJECTIVELY APPRAISE JOURNAL ARTICLES AND CONCISELY COMMUNICATE THE FINDINGS: THE P.I.C.O. METHOD

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When we read articles in medical journals, at times we all have experienced difficulty to understand or objectively appraise the evidence. I recently attended an Evidence Based Medicine workshop held locally. There was a tool there that was reasonably easy to remember and adopt as both an analytic approach and a concise way of communication.

This is the so-called P.I.C.O. method. A variety of primary articles, whether related to therapeutic intervention, diagnostic test, harm exposure or disease prognosis, can be evaluated generically using this approach. When we read such articles, the data in the method and result sections can be “dissected” into four essential components. First, define the population of interest. Second, define the intervention, test, harm exposure or disease of

interest. Third, define the alternative treatment, diagnostic standard, or comparison group. Fourth, define the outcome (death, morbidity, etc).

Examples for illustration can be as followed. Intervention trial: to study among adult insulin-dependent diabetics (P) that whether tight control with multiple insulin injections (I) can reduce mortality (O) when compared to twice-per-day injection (C). Diagnostic test: to evaluate in a general hospital geriatric medical population (P) whether serum ferritin (I) can establish or refute a diagnosis of iron deficiency (O) when compared with bone marrow aspiration (C).

Reference:

Sackett DL, Straus SE, Richardson WS, Rosenberg W, Haynes RB. Evidence-based Medicine. 2nd ed. Churchill Livingstone 2000. ■