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Is there a best single source of reliable evidence about the effects of health care?

There is not a simple answer to this. Two electronic publications are working in this direction. One is the **Cochrane Library** and the other is the **Best Evidence**, now in its 3rd version; unfortunately there is not one "best" publication. The choice of technique depends on the nature of the data needed; for each publication there are pros and cons. Below are copies of the descriptions of each one.

The **Cochrane Library** is an electronic publication designed to supply high quality evidence to inform people providing and receiving care, and those responsible for research, teaching, funding and administration at all levels. It is published quarterly on CD-ROM and the Internet, and is distributed on a subscription basis. The Abstracts of Cochrane Reviews are available without charge. The Cochrane Library includes: *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* - Regularly updated, containing 1,287 reviews of the effects of health care; *Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effectiveness* - Critical assessments and structured abstracts of 2,470 systematic reviews published elsewhere; *The Cochrane Controlled Trials Register* - Bibliographic information on 250,798 controlled trials; other sources of information on the science of reviewing research

and evidence-based health care. Also included in The Cochrane Library: *The Cochrane Review Methodology Database* - a bibliography of articles and books on the science of research synthesis; A handbook on critical appraisal and the science of reviewing research; A glossary of methodological terms; Contact details for Collaborative Review Groups and other entities in the Cochrane Collaboration; Netting the Evidence - where to find information on the Internet on using evidence in practice. Website: <http://www.update-software.com/ccweb/cochrane/cdsr.htm>

Best Evidence is the easy way to access the reliable evidence you need to solve clinical problems and provide consistent, state-of-the-art patient care. In one easy-to-search database you get every issue of both ACP Journal Club (from 1991 to 1998) and Evidence-Based Medicine (from 1995-1998); more than 1100 abstracts. The editors of these critically acclaimed publications review more than 90 journals in internal medicine and other specialties such as family practice, pediatrics, obstetrics, psychiatry, gynecology, and surgery. They choose only those articles that meet strict selection criteria for study design. Each article selected is summarized in a structured abstract, with expert commentary

putting the information in clinical perspective. Best Evidence is a convenient way to stay on top of your journal reading, providing instant electronic access to more than 1100 abstracts in one CD-ROM. It is the fastest and least expensive way to access precise summaries of the best studies of the therapeutics, diagnosis, prognosis, etiology, quality improvement, and economics of clinical problems. Website: http://www.acponline.org/catalog/cbi/best_evidence.htm

Complementary publications, both in CD-ROMs, are fundamental for those who need high quality evidence to inform people providing and receiving care, and those responsible for research, teaching, funding and administration at all levels, in other words, for everyone aware of the best information on health care.

POSTSCRIPT

Since this editorial was written a new publication has been launched. Clinical Evidence

is a half-yearly, compendium of updates on evidence of the effects of common clinical interventions, produced jointly by the BMJ Publishing Group and the American College of Physicians - American Society of Internal Medicine. It provides a concise account of the current state of knowledge, ignorance, and uncertainty about the prevention and treatment of a wide range of clinical conditions based on thorough searches of the literature. It is not a textbook of medicine nor a book of guidelines. It summarizes the best available evidence, and where there is no good evidence, it says so. With each successive issue Clinical Evidence will both update and expand its coverage. The initial focus will be on the effects of preventive and therapeutic interventions as demonstrated by randomized trials and systematic reviews of such trials. Website: <http://www.evidence.org>

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