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Andrew Moore MA
DPhil DSc CChem FRSC
Senior Research
Fellow, Pain Research
and Nuffield
Department of
Anaesthetics,
University of Oxford;
Editor, *Bandolier*

What is an NNT?

- **The number needed to treat (NNT)** has become a popular **measure of effectiveness of interventions**. NNTs are much easier to comprehend than any statistical description, and NNTs for different agents can be easily compared.
- An NNT is **treatment-specific** and describes the difference between a treatment and a control in achieving a particular clinical outcome. It can be used to describe any outcome where event rates are available for both a treatment and a control.
- Clearly defining a useful clinical outcome is the best way of calculating and using NNTs.
- **NNTs calculated from systematic reviews of randomised controlled trials provide the highest level of evidence** because systematic reviews contain all the relevant information and the largest numbers of patients available for analysis.
- **NNTs only have utility when the evidence** on which they are based **fulfils criteria of quality, validity and size**. Even data from a systematic review can be compromised.
- An NNT is just one part of the information required in making a purchasing decision. There are many other factors, including adverse effects, costs, and individual, social and medical priorities.

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