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What is a systematic review?

- **Systematic reviews have increasingly replaced traditional narrative reviews and expert commentaries** as a way of summarising research evidence.
- Systematic reviews attempt to bring the **same level of rigour to reviewing research evidence** as should be used in **producing that research evidence** in the first place.
- Systematic reviews should be based on a peer-reviewed **protocol** so that they can be **replicated** if necessary.
- **High quality systematic reviews seek to:**
 - **Identify** all relevant published and unpublished **evidence**
 - **Select studies** or reports **for inclusion**
 - **Assess the quality of each study** or report
 - **Synthesise the findings** from individual studies or reports **in an unbiased way**
 - **Interpret the findings and present a balanced and impartial summary** of the findings with due consideration of any flaws in the evidence.
- Many high quality peer-reviewed systematic reviews are available in journals as well as from databases and other electronic sources.
- Systematic reviews may examine **quantitative or qualitative evidence**; put simply, when the two or more types of evidence are examined within one review it is called a **mixed-method** systematic review.
- Systematic reviewing techniques are in a period of rapid development. Many systematic reviews still look at **clinical effectiveness**, but methods now exist to enable reviewers to examine issues of **appropriateness, feasibility and meaningfulness**.
- Not all published systematic reviews have been produced with meticulous care; therefore, the **findings may sometimes mislead**. Interrogating published reports by asking **a series of questions can uncover deficiencies**.

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