



Checklist for critical reading of clinical documentation and scientific articles

Keeping up-to-date and determining the veracity of scientific articles and clinical documentation can be overwhelming, so we've put together a checklist to help the healthcare professional. Here is a list of the important and necessary information you should look for:

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Purpose of the study

Why was the study performed? The purpose, which can be both primary and secondary, should be compared with the conclusion.

Type of study

Is it a prospective or retrospective study? Generally prospective studies are more reliable, since the criteria are set before the patients are treated. Results from randomized controlled trials outweigh non-randomized, larger studies outweigh smaller and blinded studies outweigh open studies.

Study design/method

The method used is of great importance for the outcome of the results. What is the strength in study design and what do previous studies say? Is the used method described well (which is important for reproducing)? What was the length of follow-up?

Number of clinics involved

How many clinics are involved? If more than one clinic is involved in the study it is more likely that the results can be repeated.

Number of patients

How many patients are included in the study? Do the subjects in the study represent the target population? Is the number of patients based on statistical calculations.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Eligibility criteria are used to ensure a comparable, but still representative population. What are the criteria for a patient to be included in or excluded from the study? Are factors that may have impact on the outcome considered?

Success criteria

What is a successful result according to the authors? It is important that the success criteria are clearly described.

Statistical analysis of success and failure rates

Statistical tests are used to analyze variables from the study. Was the predefined statistical tests used? Were the measurements appropriate for the questions of the study? How was data analyzed? Are results statistically and clinically relevant?

Peer review

Peer review means that the scientific article is evaluated by one or more qualified persons with similar competence as the person who created it, often experts in the field in question. Peer-review is a quality control that guarantees high standard and high credibility. Check the "Impact factor" of the journal the study was published in, since this reflects the importance of the paper.

Complications

If there are complications, adverse events or dropouts, they should be clearly described. What was the study dropout rate and what were the reasons?

Conclusion

The conclusion should be compared with the purpose of the study. Was it fulfilled? What does the study actually tell you? Is there a logical connection between the data and the interpretation? How does the result affect your daily clinical work?

