

FOREWORD

EDUCATIONAL DEBATE:

The difference between a scholarly paper, a literature review and a systematic review has been confusing authors and reviewers. This editorial attempts to highlight the differences between the three.

A scholarly paper

A scholarly paper is a review of the literature relating to a specific topic and may also be considered as a commentary if in a shortened version. This type of paper demonstrates the authors ability to highlight a problem accurately and concisely summarise relevant research around the topic and indicate directions for future research. The structure of a scholarly paper has an introductory paragraph with background information and should inform the reader about the problem to be addressed, how and why it will be addressed. There is no research methodology presented as the author is commonly expressing an opinion in most cases.

A literature review

A literature review is an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers. It aims to review the critical points of current knowledge on a particular topic. The purpose of a literature review is to convey to the reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic and what are the strengths and weaknesses. The narrative literature review are useful educational articles as they allow the reader to be brought up to date regarding the state of research in the field and familiarizes the reader with any contrasting perspectives and viewpoints on the topic (Green, Johnson, Adams, 2001). A narrative review usually has a good methodology describing where information was obtained and the methods used to conduct the review. Although considered the weakest form of evidence, it aims to be informative.

A systematic review

A systematic review is an overview of primary studies that used explicit and reproducible methods. Mulrow (1994) defined a systematic review as "concise summaries of the best available evidence that address sharply defined clinical questions". When writing a systematic review the author uses detailed and rigorous research methods which are described in a step-by-step manner. A systematic review may examine both quantitative and qualitative evidence. The purpose of a systematic review is to identify, appraise, select and synthesize all high quality research evidence relevant to a question identified. Systematic reviews of high-quality randomized controlled trials are crucial to evidence-based medicine. An understanding of systematic reviews and how to implement them in practice is becoming mandatory for all professionals involved in the delivery of health care.

References

Green B, Johnson C and Adams A (2001). Writing narrative literature reviews for peer-reviewed journals: secrets of the trade. *Journal of Sports Chiropractic and Rehabilitation*. 15(1):5-19
Mulrow C (1994). Systematic reviews: rationale for systematic reviews. *British Medical Journal*. 309: 597-599

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