New publication guidelines for systematic reviews from BMC Medicine

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Two articles in BioMed Central's open access journal *BMC Medicine* by Geoff Wong, Trisha Greenhalgh and colleagues, propose publication guidelines for both realist synthesis and meta-narrative reviews.

These are the first set of extensive guidelines covering the two types of analysis and will be invaluable to clinical researchers as well as journal editors. The standards were developed as part of the RAMESES (Realist And Meta-narrative Evidence Syntheses Evolving Standards) project. The RAMESES project is a NIHR funded international collaboration to produce such guidance and standards for these new forms of systematic review - Realist synthesis and Meta-narrative reviews. The guidelines are co-published in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing* and are freely accessible on Wiley Online Library.

There is growing interest in realist synthesis as an alternative systematic review method. This approach offers the potential to expand the knowledge base in policy-relevant areas - for example by explaining the success, failure or mixed fortunes of complex interventions. Meta-narrative review is one of an emerging menu of new approaches to qualitative and mixed-method systematic review.

A systematic review is a review done according to an explicit, robust and reproducible methodology. Author Geoff Wong explains, "For many years reviewers undertaking Cochrane reviews and meta-analyses have followed the PRISMA publication guidelines. Other forms of systematic review, oriented to summarising and synthesising quantitative,

qualitative and/or mixed-method studies, are increasing in popularity, especially in the context of policymaking, but such approaches have up to now suffered from lack of systematic guidance or publication standards."

These new guidelines for realist synthesis and meta-narrative reviews are also expected to be welcomed by journal editors, as Jigisha Patel, Medical Editor at BioMed Central explains, "The provision of a clear set of publication reporting standards is important for researchers, editors and, most importantly, reviewers. By defining a standard framework for researchers to report their methods and findings they aid thorough peer-review and ensure that published research is consistent in its methodology. The RAMESES publication standards provides much needed clarity for these new forms of literature analysis, and the upcoming publication of quality assessment tools will be needed to complement these before researchers can follow the guidelines fully "

More information: Wong G., Greenhalgh T. , Westhorp G., Buckingham J . & Pawson R. (2013) RAMESES publication standards: meta-narrative reviews. Journal of Advanced Nursing ,doi: 10.1111/jan.12092.

Wong G., Greenhalgh T. , Westhorp G., Buckingham J . & Pawson R. (2013) RAMESES publication standards: realist syntheses. Journal of Advanced Nursing, doi: 10.1111/jan.12095

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