

Consensus-Based Documents are Reality when EBM doesn't exist

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Evidence – Based Medicine

- In a perfect world, we would only practice evidence-based medicine
- Unfortunately, most of the practice of medicine occurs in areas where there are no clinical trials or meta-analyses

Expert Opinion / Consensus

- As reliable and reproducible as commonly used diagnostic methods
- RAND/UCLA Appropriateness Method is an example of consensus method using modified delphi approach

Modified Delphi Approach

- Systematic review of literature
- Create patient scenarios
- Create a panel of diverse experts
- Round of entries prior to panel meeting and then at panel meeting
- Consensus obtained by averaging responses so it is a democracy

Reliability and Validity

- With carotid endarterectomy, there were 3 panels and the intrareliability kappas were 0.5 to 0.8 which is fair to good
 - Merrick NJ Am J Public Health 1987;77:187-90.
- Consensus recommendations from RAND/UCLA panel were confirmed 6 years later in 7 RCTs on carotid endarterectomy
 - Shekelle PG Int J Technol Assess Health Care 1998;14:707-27

Appropriateness of Cataract Surgery

- Using consensus findings from RAND-UCLA regarding cataract surgery to define appropriateness
- In 768 patients, 89% who were considered appropriate for cataract surgery had 2 lines of Snellen VA improvement after cataract surgery
- 68% who were considered uncertain had VA improvement after cataract surgery
- 36% who were considered inappropriate had VA improvement after cataract surgery

Tabacman JK et al. *Medic Decis Making* 2003;23:177-9

Expert opinion/consensus

- Definitely needed because there will never be RCTs or evidence for all clinical situations
- As reliable and reproducible as commonly used diagnostic methods
- Published studies have supported predictive validity
- Uncertain areas can stimulate the development of RCTs

Conclusion

- In reality, it is not a dichotomy between evidence-based medicine and consensus but a continuum
 - RCTs may only apply to 15% or less of patients, so we extrapolate to the rest
 - Clinicians practice evidence plus expert opinion and by necessity always will
- The best way to get expert opinion is through a structured process that has been studied