

# Guidelines for review articles

Reviews of the literature can be as rigorous as primary research and can provide sufficient clarity of method to allow replication. If this is the case the approach to the review ensures an accurate, objective and thorough analysis of the topic and considers theory, method and data collection as well as findings. The more rigorous the approach taken the more the review will help the reader.

**Rigour** is increased by identifying the **population** from which the sample of studies is drawn, ensuring that the **sample** represents a good cross-section of the published domain so that all views are included and describing the **method** used to analyse the findings from the studies selected. In effect, the **method** of the review is the **procedure for selecting studies** for inclusion, the data are findings from the studies and the **results** are **conclusions drawn from the reviewing process**.

You may find the following checklist useful when preparing your review article:

- Define the topic and its boundaries. Specify the key words or terms being used in the search.
- Consider your inclusion criteria, using the following questions:
  - What timespan are you covering for the review?
  - Are you including English language publications only?
  - Are you including UK, other European and overseas publications?
  - Are you including research publications only, and therefore excluding views and opinions from professionals and policy-makers?
- What is your search method?
  - Which databases are you searching?
  - Are you including any hand-searching?
  - Are you following up any references listed in the publications selected?
- What is your approach to analysing and synthesising the data from the publications selected?

An example of a rigorous approach taken in a review article recently published in *JCN* is:

Spilsbury K, Meyer J 2001 Defining the nursing contribution to patient outcome: lessons from a review of the literature examining nursing outcomes, skill mix and changing roles. *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 10: 3-14