Economic Sources for Systematic Reviews of Health Policy

Background
Economic outcomes are commonly evaluated along with clinical outcomes in health policy research. When published in business or economics sources, such articles may not be indexed in databases traditionally consulted for clinical systematic reviews. The goal of this dual case study was to explore the significance of non-health sources, especially databases that index economic research in comprehensive searching for a systematic review of health policy interventions.

Methods
We are performing case studies of two literature searches for systematic reviews of health policy interventions: one on Formulary-Based Drug Coverage Policies and one on Direct to Consumer Advertising of Pharmaceuticals.

All citations retrieved for the reviews were tagged with their source(s) of origin (typically database name). Absolute number and percentage of relevant citations were tracked after the initial “weeding” - after full-text screening and after the reviewers had assessed full-text articles for meeting review inclusion criteria. Citation sources were analyzed for number of results used in the review, number of unique results used in the review, and “missed” results (that turned up in another database search and “should have been duplicated in that database as well”.

Results*
Results indicate that Medline and EMBASE, while highest in number of citations, had very few unique citations. Non-biomedical sources, such as economic and business databases, on the other hand, garnered relevant results not indexed in biomedical databases. Citation tracing garnered more unique results than any database.

Of the twelve articles included in the Formulary-Based Drug Coverage Policies review, only three were unique to a particular database. Those databases were EconLit, ABI-Inform, and Digital Dissertations. Five additional articles were uniquely identified through citation tracing. The remaining four articles appeared in multiple data sources.

Discussion
While the Direct to Consumer Advertising systematic review has not yet undergone a final full-text weed, preliminary results indicate that a similar pattern is emerging, where the smaller, non-biomedical sources appear to be providing more unique, non-duplicated citations.

Key Messages
Large databases of the type that would be most useful for an initial literature search are not necessarily the most important in a systematic review, as they produced few, if any, unique citations.

Business and economics databases can provide articles not indexed in traditional health or medical databases.

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*Results at time of poster are incomplete and preliminary. Full results will be available as the second review is completed.

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SYSTEMATIC SEARCH AND WEE cling PROCESS

Formulary-based policies systematic review

Where were the articles from?

ORIGINS OF INCLUDED STUDIES

DUPLICATE CITATIONS

Where did the final review articles originate?

Research supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).