

Can I Learn to Critically Assess an Article?

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I admit to having a limited understanding and appreciation for evidence-based practice (EBP) before undertaking my Masters degree. When I learned the skill to do so, I was delighted to go back to my stacks of journals (that I had never thrown out for the last 14 years) and re-read some of the articles with a keener awareness. I was astounded at how much I had been missing by not understanding the literature better. So, how can you learn more about literature evaluation so that you can put evidence-based practice into your clinical practice?

Following are some internet resources to check out:

www.pedro.fhs.usyd.edu.au/tutorial is a site that describes how to differentiate if a clinical trial is valid and how to use studies to make clinical decision.

www.poems.msu.edu/InfoMastery/ was one of my favorite sites in learning this skill. This site holds is an online course (from Michigan State University Family Practice) that you can read through. I quite like the POEMs and DOEs portion... Does this paper matter to my practice? Oh, you'll just have to read it for yourself! ☺

www.ivis.org is a great veterinary resource, and you can find a great article on how to read a scientific paper. Go into the IVIS site, click onto journals/conference proceedings, then go to The American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) and in the 1999 conference proceedings look for:

Ramey, DM. 1999, How to read a scientific paper. Proceedings of the American Association of Equine Practitioners. 45: 280 – 284.

If it was shorter, I would have requested permission to reprint it for you here...but if you actually go to the site – you can learn so much more.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi> is the site for Pubmed... a public site to search for research article abstracts. Unfortunately, abstracts don't give you the whole picture. They can help you make some decisions, but without seeing how the research was conducted, you don't know if it is high quality research. I use this site all the time however...looking up things like syringomyelia in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels when clients ask or if there is research for curcumin use in dogs with cancer. (You will be surprised what people will ask...and with this site, at least you can both look for scientific articles on the subject.)

On a human note, I am a big fan of Braham Jam's newsletter, website, e-blasts and new book. Braham does a fabulous job of searching the literature, synthesizing it and presenting it to clinicians in a clinically-friendly, ready-to-use format. The website is www.aptei.com. The human field will always be further ahead in researching physiotherapy than the veterinary industry. So the more up-to-date you are on human literature (and then thought process on if and how the information might translate to an animal patient), the better you will be in clinical practice. As well, you are better able to justify what you do to a veterinary profession that finds the concepts of rehabilitation to be 'new'.

Hopefully this gets you a bit more excited to get your feet wet in evaluating scientific literature and helps you to find the resources to do so. Happy article hunting!