

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:
APPLES OR APPLES AND ORANGES?
ASSESSING RESEARCH FINDINGS FOR USE IN CLINICAL PRACTICE**

Purpose

Students and novice researchers often include studies in their evidence base that are not related directly to their problem statement or PICO question. This exercise is intended to help create an awareness of what to look for in abstracts you retrieve to support your projects, and to help you differentiate apples from oranges and any other fruit.

Introduction

Abstracts of three studies are attached for your review. One is a randomized controlled trial, one is a randomized controlled crossover study, and the third is controlled trial with randomized start. The objective of this exercise is for you to make a judgment about whether or not the three studies belong in the same evidence base related to the following clinical problem that you might observe and want to do something about:

Quality data in my institution during the past year demonstrated that patients were dissatisfied with the quality of their sleep while hospitalized for surgical procedures. These data also indicated the rate of satisfaction with sleep was 10% below the desired benchmark set by the institution. My fellow staff nurses and I are wondering if the use of music would help increase the quality of sleep of our patients and thus increase their ratings for this item on the patient satisfaction survey.

The Exercise

First, read each abstract from a critical perspective. I assume that you have previously had experience regarding how to critique research reports in your baccalaureate and/or master's programs so that I will not use our time together to do that in class. What I want to focus on with you now is how to decide whether or not research reports are related to a specific clinical problem and whether or not they belong in the same evidence base. Remember that we only will have half an hour for this exercise. Therefore, please read and think about each abstract carefully. Think specifically about the questions below.

The Questions

1. What is the dependent variable in each study? Are they the same, similar or completely different?
2. What is the independent variable in each study? Are they related? If so, how?
3. What are the clinical problems that led the authors to do the research? Again, are they the same, similar or completely different?
4. What is the population in each study? Are the populations comparable?
5. Based on your answers to the above questions, would you say that these three studies belong in the same evidence base? That is, are they sufficiently related for you to consider them together when deciding on whether or not to apply the findings to practice?

