

What is good evidence for practice?

Australian National Medical Health and Research Council

The Australian National Medical Health and Research Council (NHMRC) has developed several handbooks that go into considerable detail about how to assess scientific literature, what is good evidence, how to appraise and present reviews of the literature and information regarding clinical practice guidelines. See the publications section of the NHMRC website (<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/cp65syn.htm>) for further in depth information. Also detailed are suggested guidelines to be used to evaluate the levels of evidence that have been obtained for an intervention (generally through some sort of evaluation procedure).

Sheffield University

While multiple sites (including Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evidence-based_medicine#Evidence-based_guidelines) give an introduction and overview of best practice evidence, Sheffield University also briefly and simply summarise the levels of evidence (see <http://www.shef.ac.uk/scharr/ir/units/systrev/hierarchy.htm>). While referring to biomedical sciences they suggest that "...there is general agreement over a hierarchy: the higher up a methodology is ranked, the more robust and closer to objective truth it is assumed to be."

The hierarchy has direct relevance to the non medical field with the highest level of evidence being systematic reviews or meta analyses. While these are not studies in and of themselves – they summarise evidence from multiple studies and programs. Good evidence to support an intervention is provided by reviews or meta analyses that show findings replicated at a variety of sites with multiple independent researchers.

Progressively lower levels of evidence are from randomised controlled trials, cross sectional surveys and so forth – down to more anecdotal evidence.

See the Sheffield website for a [relatively simple overview](#) and the NHMRC guidelines for a [comprehensive review](#).

Unfortunately very few COPMI and FaPMI interventions have been evaluated and those that have display evidence lower down the evidence quality hierarchy. This has largely led to the need for websites such as this to help assist practitioners and researchers to gather evidence about interventions and programs in this area.