

ORAL PRESENTATION

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How are systematic reviews used in the planning and design of health technology assessment funded trials?

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Background

Limited evidence exists on how systematic reviews are used in the design of new trials. A study by Jones (2013) showed that 11 out of 48 applications made no reference to a systematic review. Of the 37 trials referencing a systematic review 20 reported their use in the design of the trial.

Objectives

To replicate and verify Jones' study and explore the reasons why some trials do not refer or use a systematic review. The study also included an updated cohort of NIHR HTA trials to identify any improvements over time.

Methods

Two cohorts of NIHR HTA randomised controlled trials were included. Cohort I included the same trials as Jones (2006-2008). Cohort II included NIHR HTA trials funded in 2013. Data extraction was undertaken independently by two reviewers and results were presented using descriptive statistics.

Results

Justifying the need for new primary research using a systematic review is not always feasible. Our study found nine (19%) and three (9%) trials from cohort I and II respectively where a systematic review was not referenced. Although our findings were similar to Jones, we found all nine trials had a justifiable reason for not referring to a systematic review.

Conclusions

The results of this study demonstrate how 85% of NIHR HTA trials use systematic reviews to inform the design and planning of a new trial. Systematic reviews play an important role in the development of clinical trials and the implications of this will be discussed.

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