CADTH’s Health Technology Inquiry Service Rapid Literature Searches

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Background

The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH) is an independent, not-for-profit agency funded by Canadian federal, provincial, and territorial governments to provide credible, impartial advice and evidence-based information about the effectiveness of drugs and other health technologies to Canadian health care decision-makers.

CADTH produces a variety of publications ranging from full health technology assessments (HTAs), which may take up to a year to complete, to short rapid assessments, which take from 24 hours to four months to complete.

Canadian health care decision-makers often must make decisions quickly and cannot wait for a full HTA. CADTH’s Health Technology Inquiry Service (HTIS) is an information service created to provide Canadian health care decision-makers with HTA information based on the best available evidence in a timely and efficient manner.

CADTH Information Specialists are an integral part of the HTIS service and work closely with the research teams to prepare a variety of HTIS products ranging from reference lists to detailed assessments of the best evidence-based information on a topic.

This poster presents the HTIS Information Specialists’ challenges and strategies for conducting rapid evidence-based literature searches.

Challenges of HTIS Literature Searches

- The main challenge faced by HTIS Information Specialists is the limited time available to develop and run the searches (often one to three days).
- The questions often remain broad in scope even after discussion between the requestors and the HTIS representatives.
- There is often very little evidence on new and emerging technologies and drugs.
- Because each new request requires different types of information and the depth of the final HTIS report varies, an adaptive approach is needed.

HTIS Strategies for Literature Searches

- HTIS Information Specialists focus on precision in retrieval rather than recall in their searches.
- HTIS Information Specialists apply tight search filters (search strategies used to identify and limit search results to specific study types), use an abbreviated grey literature search checklist, and apply strict date and language limits.
- Instead of searching multiple databases, HTIS Information Specialists rely heavily on PubMed, Internet searching, and subject-specific grey literature — for example, association websites.
- The HTIS limits searches to specific study types such as HTA reports, systematic reviews, and evidence-based guidelines.
- To ensure quality and rigour, all database strategies are internally peer-reviewed by another Information Specialist.

HTIS Evaluation Findings

- Evaluations from HTIS users have been very positive. Most respondents were very satisfied (88%) or satisfied (11%) with the service in general. There were no unsatisfied respondents (0%). With regard to content, 56% and 38% responded that they were very satisfied or satisfied, respectively.

Main Sources Used by the HTIS for Searching

- PubMed or MEDLINE
- Lippincott
- Embase (if PubMed or MEDLINE is insufficient)
- National Guideline Clearinghouse
- The Cochrane Library
- Canadian HTA agencies
- The Centre for Reviews and Dissemination databases
- Main international HTA agencies
- EBI Institute
- Focused Internet search

An ongoing need for HTIS service demonstrates that there is a substantial demand for good quality, timely information on health technologies and drugs. According to the evaluation findings, despite tight deadlines, it is possible to perform quality searches that provide valuable and timely information to decision-makers.

Databases such as PubMed or MEDLINE, the Cochrane Library, and the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination databases are crucial to providing this service.

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