

PICO: An Introduction

By Travis Real, MLIS, Unit Assistant Director
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center
Library of the Health Sciences in the Permian Basin

PICO is a search strategy model that helps clarify the questions that need to be answered. It stands for patient or population, intervention, comparison, and outcomes.

- ▶ **Patients/Population** -- Who are your patients? Describe the patient in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, past medical history, etc.
- ▶ **Intervention** -- What action, or sets of action, are you considering? What should be done with treatment, diagnostics, prognostics, etc.?
- ▶ **Comparison** -- What are your alternatives and compared to what (Nothing? Placebo? Physical Therapy? Drug Therapy?)?
- ▶ **Outcome** -- What do you expect to accomplish with this information? What is the effect of the intervention?

Steps to an Effective Evidence-Based Medicine Literature Search

1. Began with a clinical problem.
2. Invoke PICO.
3. Look to the literature that has the best evidence.
PubMed – Limits and Clinical Queries
Cochrane Databases in OVID
4. Try to find other clinical sources for best practice ideas.
www.guidelines.gov
ACP Pier
MDConsult
5. Evaluate what you have.
6. Make a decision to maintain the status quo, gather more data, or change the search procedure all together.