

Asking the Right Questions: The Refinement of Topics for Systematic Reviews

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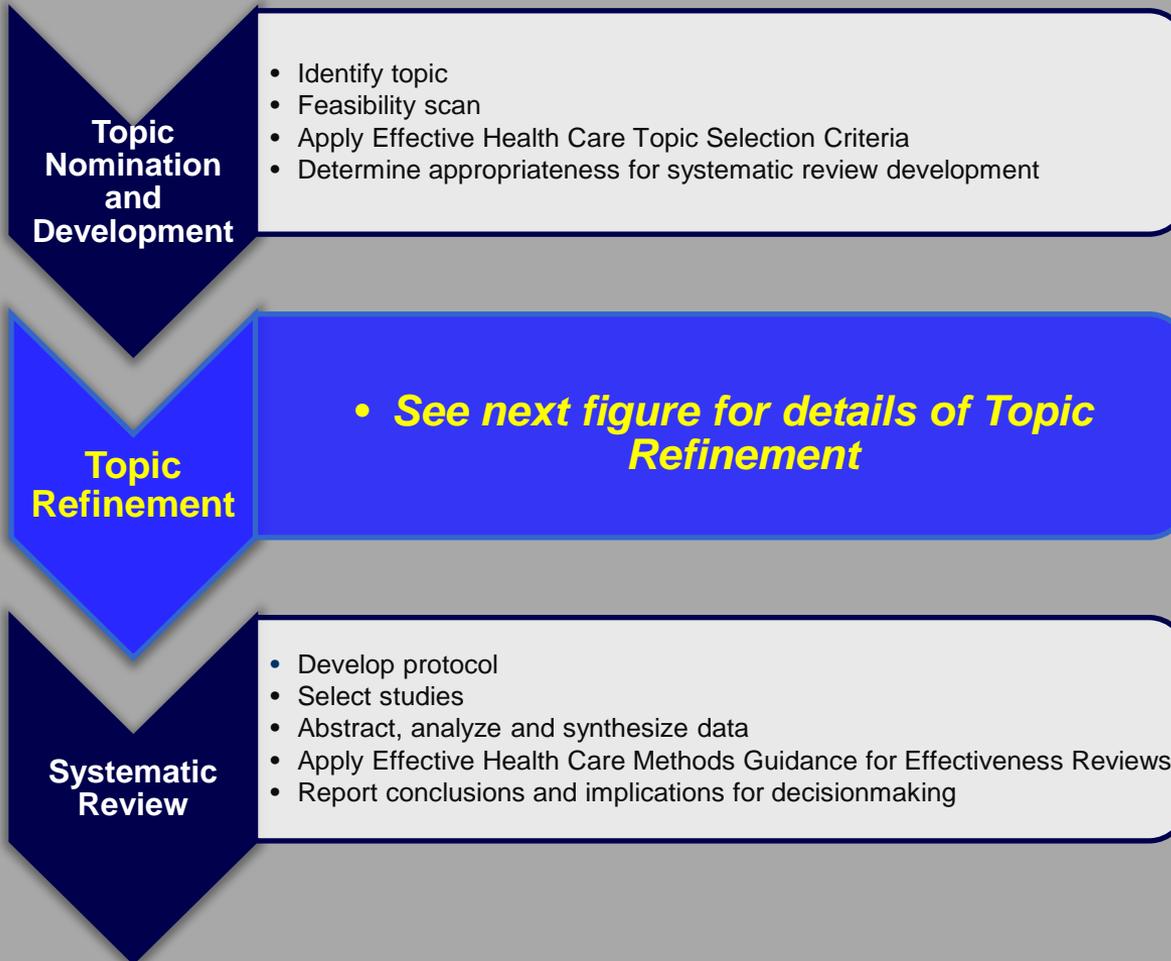
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Objectives

- Why topic refinement?
- What is refinement?
- What makes a good question?
- Description of guiding principles

Major Stages in Producing a Systematic Review



The Process of Topic Refinement in AHRQ's EPC Program

Original Nominated Topic

- Topic nomination/development team sends the EPC a stakeholder-nominated topic that has met program selection criteria for topic refinement
- Topic refinement begins with documents that include the following:
 - 1) Description of the proposed topic question and the needs of the nominator
 - 2) Summary of a preliminary literature scan for topic feasibility
 - 3) Possible preliminary PICOTS

Initial Topic Refinement

- Review preliminary literature scan, and supplement as needed, to: 1) Understand the topic and decisional dilemmas; 2) Become familiar with extent of literature
- Informal interviews with local topical experts to understand technical aspects
- Develop provisional PICOTS, key questions, and analytic framework
- Identify key issues for discussion with stakeholders, related to technical issues, controversies, stakeholder values and priorities

Key Informant Interviews

- Identify and recruit key informants to represent relevant stakeholder groups
- Schedule interviews with deliberate composition of each interview group
- Conduct key informant interviews
- Integrate and synthesize key informant input to make indicated changes in PICOTS, key questions, and/or analytic framework

Synthesis and Reporting

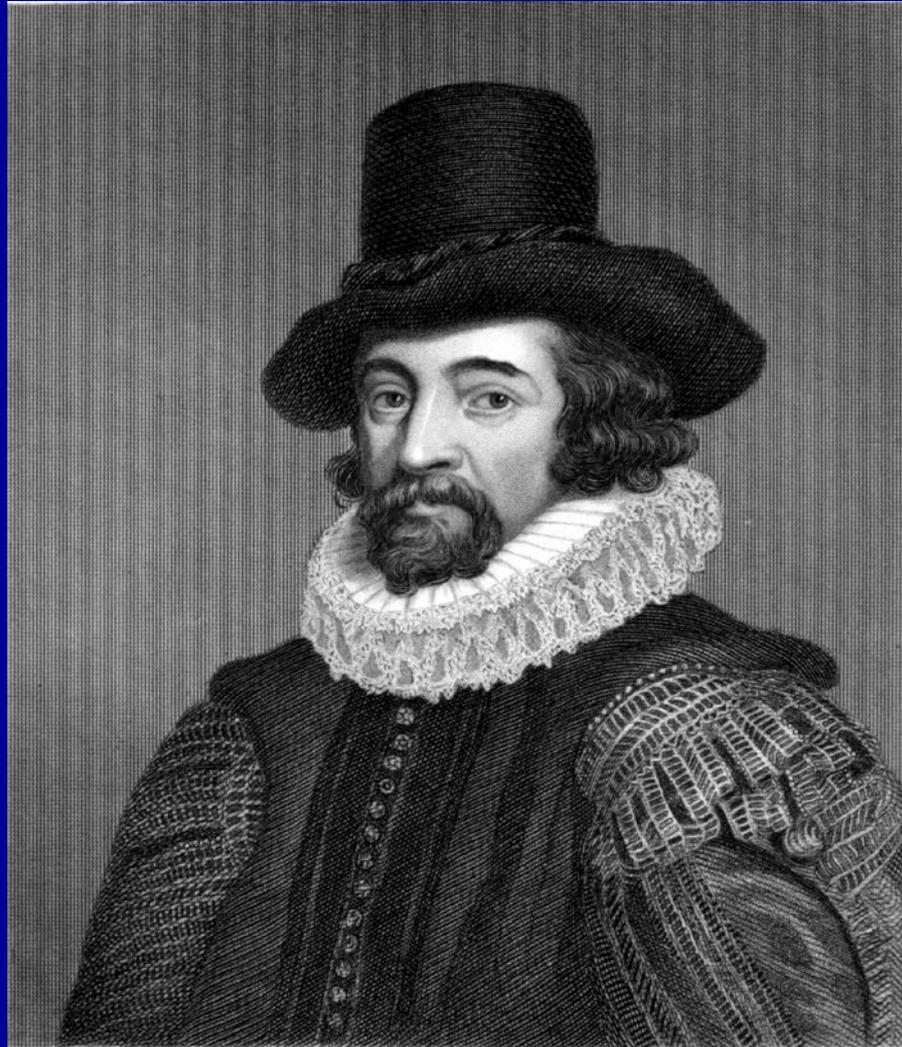
- Consider relevant input (literature review, topical experts, Key Informants) that might indicate need for refinement in PICOTS, key questions, or analytic framework
- For specific unsettled questions, consider technical issues, stakeholder perspectives, and/or guiding principles to make balanced decisions
- Provisional summary report that transparently documents the evolution of the topic and clearly explains the rationale behind refinement decisions

Public Posting

- The refined topic is posted on the AHRQ website for public comment
- The topic refinement team, the systematic review team, or both review all public comments and may make further (usually minor) revisions
- The topic moves to the systematic review team for development of the systematic review protocol

Why topic refinement?

“A prudent question is one-half of wisdom.” - Francis Bacon



Nominated Topics

May not be ideally formulated:

- To be most relevant for the public health or clinical issue of interest
- To be feasibly researchable
- To reflect state of the science or technical aspects of the topic
- Imprecise or overly inclusive
- Overly narrow

What is Refinement ?

Refinement implies making changes to attain a better fit with:

- The health care question or dilemma of interest
- Priorities or values of stakeholders and users of the systematic review
- State of the science and technical aspects of the topic
- Systematic review methods

What is Refinement ?

- May involve narrowing the focus of some elements of the PICOTS*
- May involve expanding some elements
- May involve both
- Means formulating good key questions and analytic framework

* PICOTS: Population; Intervention; Comparator;
Outcome; Timing; Setting

Key Questions

- Guide the systematic review
- Reflect clinical logic and decisional dilemmas
- Precise, detailed, and clearly focused
- At a minimum, include PICO: population(s), intervention(s), comparator(s), outcomes(s)
- PICO elements and relationships specifically and unambiguously described
- Formulated without judgment about extant literature

Question

How effective is risk assessment
for pressure ulcers?

Key Questions

KQ 1:

For adults in various patient settings^a, is use of any risk assessment tool^b effective in reducing the incidence of pressure ulcers compared with other risk assessment tools, clinical judgment, and/or usual care?

^a Including acute care hospital, long-term care facility, and rehabilitation facility.

^b Such as the Braden Scale, Norton Scale, Waterlow Scale, or others.

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Guiding Principles



Guiding Principles

- Fidelity to Original Nomination
- Relevance
- Research Feasibility
- Responsiveness to Stakeholder Input
- Reduction of Investigator Bias
- Transparency
- Suitable Scope

Applying the Principles

- Frequent need to balance principles against each other
- Relative importance of principles may vary
- Recommendations not meant to prescribe how principles are applied or balanced....only that they are considered
- Investigators must use judgment and discretion

Guideline Groups as Partners in Topic Refinement

- Start with well-formulated PICOTS, Key Questions, and Analytic Framework
- Understand the principles of topic refinement
- Participate as Key Informants in interviews with other stakeholders
- Possible role as observer and/or participant in all Key Informant interviews

For More Information:

Buckley DI, Ansari M, Butler M, Williams C, Chang C. The Refinement of Topics for Systematic Reviews: Lessons and Recommendations From the Effective Health Care Program. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Methods Guide for Comparative Effectiveness Reviews. January 2013. AHRQ Publication No. 13-EHC023-EF.

Available at:

www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/reports/final.cfm.

Questions & Discussion

