

Appraising a Randomized Controlled Trial

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)

*making sense of evidence about effective
health care*

11 questions to help you make sense of a trial

General comments

Three broad issues need to be considered when appraising a trial:

- a. Are the results of the trial valid?
- b. What are the results?
- c. Will the results help locally?

The 11 questions on the following pages are designed to help you think about these issues systematically.

The first three questions are screening questions and can be answered quickly. If the answer to all three is 'yes', it is worth proceeding with the remaining questions.

There is a fair degree of overlap between several of the questions.

You are asked to record a 'yes', 'no' or 'can't tell' to most of the questions.

A number of italicised hints are given after each question. There are designed to remind you why the question is important, not to be answered individually.

The 11 questions are adapted from: Guyatt GH, Sackett DL, Cook DL, Cook DJ, Users' guides to the medical literature. 11. How to use an article about therapy or prevention. JAMA 1993; 270: 2598-2601 and 271: 59-63

These questions are available on the CASP web site (<http://www.his.ox.ac.uk/casp/>)

Evidence-Based Health Care

A. Are the results of the trial valid?

Screening Questions

1. Did the trial address a clearly focused issue? Yes Can't tell No

HINT: An issue can be 'focused' in terms of:

- The population studied
- The intervention given
- The outcomes considered

2. Was the assignment of patients to treatments randomized? Yes Can't tell No

3. Were all of the patients who entered the trial properly accounted for at its conclusion Yes Can't tell No

HINT: Look for:

- The completion of follow up
- Whether patients were analysed in the groups to Which they were randomised

Is it worth continuing?

Detailed Questions

4. Were patients, health workers and study personnel 'blind' to treatment? Yes Can't tell No

- Were patients?
- Were the health worker?
- Were the study personnel?

5. Were the groups similar at the start of the trial? Yes Can't tell No

HINT: Think about other factors that might effect the outcome such as age, sex, social class

6. Aside from the experimental intervention, were the groups treated equally? Yes Can't tell No

HINT: For example, were they reviewed at the same time Intervals

B/ What are the results?

7. How large was the treatment effect?

What outcomes were measured?

8. How precise was the estimate of the treatment effect?

HINT: Look for confidence limits

C/ Will the results help locally?

9. Can the results be applied to the local population? Yes Can't tell No

HINT: Do you think that the patients covered by the trial are similar enough to your population?

10. Were all important outcomes considered? Yes Can't tell No

HINT: If not, does this affect the decision?

11. Are the benefits worth the harms and costs? Yes No
