

Editorial

The Importance of Evidence Based Practice

The last decades has seen great changes in health care with the emergence of evidence based practice (EBP). EBP relates to clinical decision making and is often defined as 'the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients'¹. Fundamentally EBP requires us as clinicians to integrate the best available evidence with our clinical expertise when managing patients. Beyond us as clinicians caring for patients, EBP also influences policy and organisational guidelines.

To aid in the evaluation of the available evidence, hierarchies have been developed to assist in ranking the quality of research. Whilst the development of hierarchies of evidence have raised our understanding of differences in research quality, the simplification of such grading systems can be misleading as levels alone do not always reflect the strength of the evidence. The appraising of literature and interpretation of research findings to determine the strength of evidence requires a high level of skill from the clinician. Furthermore, the process of EBP generally involves formulating a clinical question which is operationalised by developing a database search strategy, searching the literature and identifying appropriate papers, in addition to synthesising and appraising the literature and reflecting or evaluating the application of evidence. Hence, whilst clinicians are expected to manage a patients' ocular

condition by considering the best available evidence, this is not often a simple task.

Given the importance of integrating evidence into practice, it is clear that we must equip clinicians with the EBP skills. Future graduates entering the orthoptic profession must also have a sound understanding of utilising evidence to optimise outcomes and minimise risks for patients. Our academics are acknowledging the significance of evidence-based care and have recently further embedded the concept and process of EBP within the new emerging curriculum. In the near future our graduates will be better equipped to provide high quality care by integrating the best available evidence into their practice.

REFERENCES

1. Sackett, DL, Rosenberg WMC, Muir Gray JA, Haynes RB, Richardson WS. Evidence-Based Medicine: What it is and what it isn't. *British Medical Journal* 1996;312:71-72

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