To begin the Evidence-Based Dentistry (EBD) search process start with a well-developed and answerable question. A good clinical question will:

- Save time when researching
- Keep the focus directly on the patient's need
- Suggest the appropriate form that a useful answer may take

The clinical question will impact the entire Evidence-Based Dentistry (EBD) literature searching process.

| Clinical Question | Search Terms | Literature Search (Medline) | Evidence-Based Answer |

Elements of the Clinical Question

A good clinical question will have four major elements considered: Patient, Intervention, Comparison and Outcome, commonly known as PICO.

**Patient**: A clinical question must identify a patient or patient group and include any information that is relevant to the treatment or diagnosis or the patient.

For Example: You might include the patient's sex, age, race, disease history and primary complaint.

**Intervention**: The intervention is what you plan to do for your patient or patient group.

For example, you might: run tests, prescribe drug treatment, refer to a specialist or schedule surgery.

**Comparison**: In general most, but not all, clinical questions have a comparison. A comparison is the alternative that you want to compare to your intervention.

For example: Is aspirin as effective in preventing strokes as warfarin?

**Outcome**: The outcome is the hoped for effect of the intervention.

For example: If I prescribe aspirin for my patient it will prevent strokes. Outcome = Prevented Strokes.

**Sample Case**: A seven-year old male patient is found to have two cavities requiring fillings. His father asks if an electric toothbrush might help his son avoid cavities in the future.

**A possible Question**: In the case of a seven-year old male (Patient) is a powered toothbrush (Intervention) as effective as a manual toothbrush (Comparison) in avoiding tooth decay (Outcome)?

For more information on EBD searching visit http://medlib.bu.edu/tutorials/ebm/

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