

## Book reviews

### **How to Read a Paper: The Basics of Evidence-Based Medicine, 5<sup>th</sup> edn**

By Trisha Greenhalgh

Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken, NJ, 2014, 284 pages, paperback, £31.99 (e-book available, £28.99)

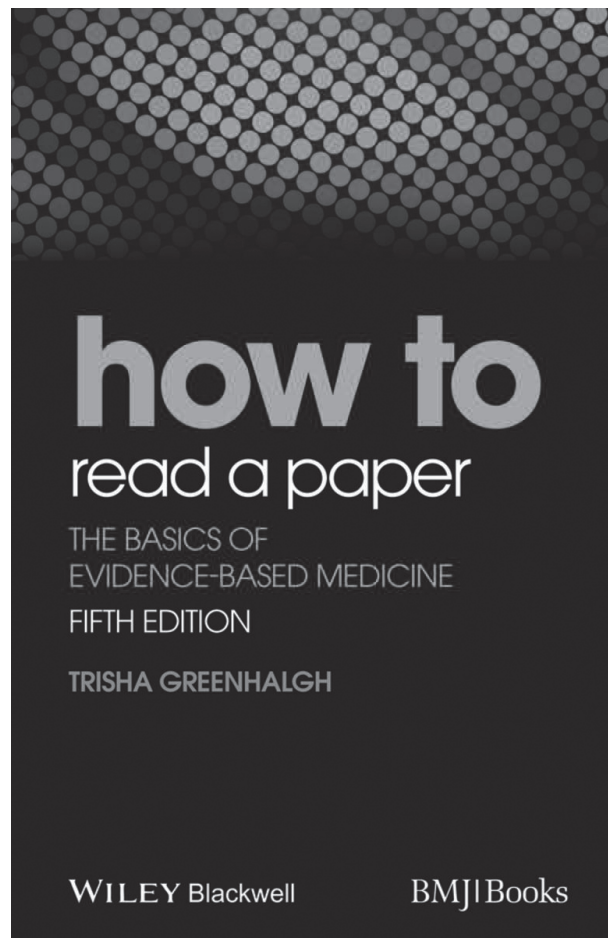
ISBN-13: 978-1-118-80096-6

The evidence-based medicine (EBM) approach to clinical practice is now a contractual requirement. However, unless individuals are doing structured/academic work, the amount of guidance on how to read medical literature is variable. Therefore, it is paramount that clinicians are confident about their ability to read, critique and apply the information offered, otherwise they risk failing to comprehend wholly what they accept or dismiss.

*How to Read a Paper: The Basics of Evidence-Based Medicine* is a book that has become a core introductory text on many university reading lists. The first edition was published in 1996, and Trisha Greenhalgh's aim was to encourage a systematic approach to applying evidence to clinical practice. This fifth edition, a testimony in itself to how useful people have found it, has retained many of the original chapters. While approximately 75% of the text is focused on how to read papers, two new chapters have been added: one on applying this approach with patients; and another on criticisms of EBM. The author also briefly deals with how guidelines are constructed, and why evidence-based policy-making is so hard to achieve.

As its short length indicates, *How to Read a Paper* is not a textbook, but Greenhalgh compensates for what it lacks in size by providing high-quality content. This well-written book is inspiring, engaging, lively and accessible, and peppered with good humour and well-placed anecdotes. While practising clinicians should be acquainted with most of the ideas covered, it is useful to remind ourselves of the basics. This process allows us to reassess and revalidate our medical knowledge and how it is constructed.

Each chapter is brief, logical and independent of the others, which allows you to find the required information easily. The first 14 chapters outline a straightforward method of reviewing the literature, and provide a structure to help you read and critique papers in a meaningful



way. This edition also includes up-to-date references. A short guide to critical evaluation, the book is a good starting place before moving on to more-detailed texts on specific topics such as study bias and statistics, to which Greenhalgh only devotes small sections.

The new chapter on applying the EBM approach with patients is well constructed, and the author considers some of the challenges and complexities that doctors and patients face when examining scientific evidence together. The patient's perspective and patient-reported outcome measures are discussed, and then the competencies that clinicians need to practise during shared decision-making with their patients are detailed. Examples of the tools that can be used to facilitate this (e.g. option grids) are offered in a user-friendly way, which allows us to adopt an individual approach to how we practise.

The final chapter, which explores common criticisms of EBM and explains why it will never be the font of all knowledge, includes

strong philosophical arguments and explains why evidence-based policy-making is so hard to achieve. It is apt that the author of a book that promotes proper critical analysis of evidence critically appraises the whole process in relation to modern healthcare practice.

We may now understand EBM better than we did when the first edition of *How to Read a Paper* was written over 20 years ago, but we still need to critically evaluate claims made in the literature. This book will be relevant at all stages of your career – from student to experienced clinician and beyond. It could also facilitate the planning or writing of a paper, since knowing what editors are looking for can only assist in meeting their requirements. I have certainly taken something different from it each time that I have used it. This recently updated edition will make you think about your thinking, balance your sources of information, and help you to demonstrate what you know and how to use that information optimally to treat your patients.

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### **Research Methods in Health: Investigating Health and Health Services, 4<sup>th</sup> edn**

By Ann Bowling

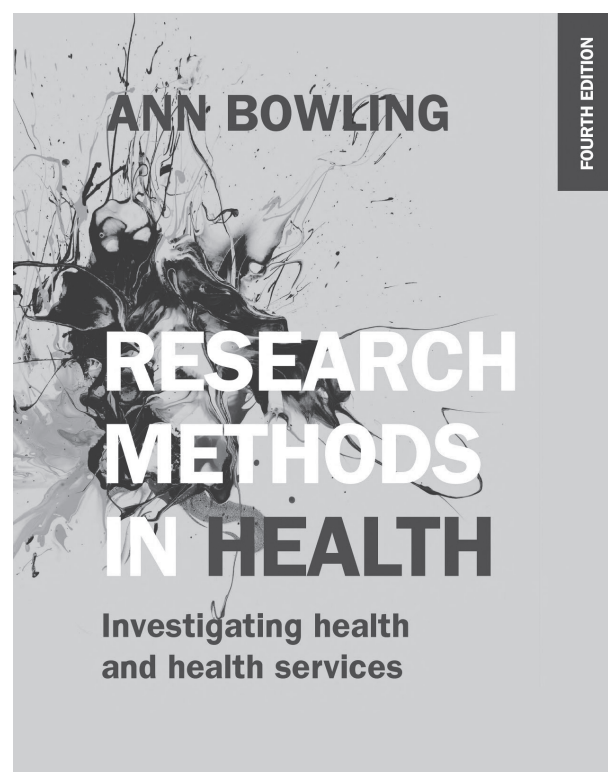
Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2014,  
536 pages, paperback, £31.49 (e-book available,  
£26.99)

ISBN-13: 978-0-335-26274-8

For physiotherapists who are working in pelvic health, undertaking a clinical audit, service evaluation or research project can be daunting. Many books aim to guide healthcare professionals through the research process, but *Research Methods in Health: Investigating Health and Health Services* has remained a popular choice for clinicians.

The updated and expanded fourth edition provides both a comprehensive overview of research methods, and a practical guide to undertaking research in healthcare. The book is comprised of five key sections that explain and appraise the theory and practice of quantitative, qualitative and mixed research methods.

The first section clearly outlines the differences between research, service evaluation and



audit, and will help to steer any healthcare professional towards the best approaches to undertaking these kinds of work. It provides an easy-to-follow guide to conducting a literature review that covers coming up with an initial project idea, the formulation of a good research question, an objectives list and a hypothesis, and then how best to present a research proposal.

While research methods are the primary focus of this book, sections I and II also effectively consider: the multidisciplinary scope of research; its social impact; and the philosophy underpinning research principles and healthcare psychology. The author discusses the impact of research on economics, which will be of particular interest to many clinicians in the current healthcare climate, where the cost implications of undertaking any study are a significant part of the planning process.

Sections III and IV discuss the research principles of quantitative methods and the procedures involved. The fifth and final section examines the processes that underpin qualitative and mixed research methods. Interesting examples of approaches to research are provided throughout to increase the reader's understanding of the uses and limitations of various methods. The author draws on her own experience to scrupulously review and critique these methods, which enables the reader to decide on the most beneficial approach to designing a successful research protocol.

Despite *Research Methods in Health* being a lengthy book, it is well-indexed, easy to dip in and out of as required, and useful as a reference text. It is also excellently presented, and an invaluable source of information for first-time or experienced researchers alike. Even if you do not want to undertake any research, it will help to improve your understanding of research methods, and refine your ability to review, critique and appreciate the methods employed in the protocols of clinical studies. This book is a definite “must

have” for any departmental library or physiotherapist undertaking research.

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