Contents

roreword to the first edition by Professor Sir David Weatherall	XII		
Preface to the seventh edition	xiv		
Preface to the first edition			
Acknowledgements	xix		
Chapter 1 Why read papers at all?	1		
Does 'evidence-based medicine' simply mean 'reading papers			
in medical journals'?	1		
Why do people sometimes groan when you mention			
evidence-based healthcare?	4		
Before you start: formulate the problem	11		
Exercises based on this chapter			
References	14		
Chapter 2 Searching the literature	15		
The information jungle	15		
What are you looking for?	16		
Levels upon levels of evidence	17		
Synthesised sources: systems, summaries and syntheses	18		
Pre-appraised sources: synopses of systematic reviews and primary studies			
Specialised resources	22		
Primary studies: tackling the jungle	23		
One-stop shopping: federated search engines	25		
Using artificial intelligence to search the literature	25		
Asking for help and asking around	26		
Online tutorials for effective searching	26		
Exercises based on this chapter	27		
References	28		
Chapter 3 Getting your bearings: what is this paper about?	30		
The science of 'trashing' papers	30		
Three preliminary questions to get your bearings	32		

viii Contents

What are randomised controlled trials and why do they matter?	34		
What are cohort studies?	38		
What are case-control studies?			
What are cross-sectional surveys?			
What are case reports?	41		
The traditional hierarchy of evidence	42		
Exercises based on this chapter	43		
References	43		
Chapter 4 Assessing methodological quality	45		
Was the study original?	45		
Who is the study about?	46		
Was the design of the study sensible?	47		
Was bias avoided or minimised?	49		
Was assessment 'blind'?	54		
Were preliminary statistical questions addressed?	55		
A note on ethical considerations	58		
Summing up	59		
Exercises based on this chapter	60		
References	60		
Chapter 5 Statistics for the non-statistician	63		
How can non-statisticians evaluate statistical tests?	63		
Have the authors set the scene correctly?	65		
Paired data, tails and outliers	71		
Correlation, regression and causation	72		
Probability and confidence	74		
The bottom line (quantifying the chance of benefit and harm)	77		
Summary	79		
Exercises based on this chapter	79		
References	80		
And the second of the second s			
Chapter 6 Papers that report clinical trials of simple interventions	82		
What is a clinical trial?	82		
Drug trials: 'evidence' and marketing	83		
Making decisions about therapy	86		
Surrogate endpoints	87		
What information to expect in a paper describing a randomised			
controlled trial: the CONSORT statement	91		
Getting worthwhile evidence from pharmaceutical representatives	91		
A note on vaccine trials	94		
Exercises based on this chapter	95		
References	95		

	Co	ntents D
Chapter 7	Papers that report trials of complex interventions	99
Complex int	terventions	99
Ten question	ns to ask about a paper describing a complex intervention	101
Exercises ba	sed on this chapter	106
References		107
Chapter 8	Papers that report diagnostic or screening tests	109
Ten suspects	in the dock	109
Validating d	iagnostic tests against a gold standard	110
Ten question	is to ask about a paper that claims to validate	
a diagnost	tic or screening test	115
Likelihood r	atios	119
Clinical pred	liction models	122
Exercises ba	sed on this chapter	124
References		125
Chapter 9	Papers that summarise other papers	
	(systematic reviews and meta-analyses)	128
When is a re	view systematic?	128
Evaluating s	ystematic reviews: five questions to ask	131
Meta-analys	is for the non-statistician	137
Explaining h	eterogeneity	142
New approac	ches to systematic review	145
Exercises bas	sed on this chapter	146
References		146
Chapter 10	Papers that advise you what to do (guidelines)	151
The great gu	idelines debate	151
Ten question	s to ask about a clinical guideline	155
Exercises bas	sed on this chapter	162
References		162
Chapter 11	Papers that estimate what things cost	
	(health economic evaluations)	164
	conomic evaluation?	164
Health econo	omics studies: two key approaches	166
Costs and be	nefits of health interventions	167
Measuring th	ne value of health states	168
Quality-adju	sted life-years	169
Low-value he	ealth: choosing wisely	171
Twelve quest	ions to ask about a health economic evaluation	172
Conclusion		176
Exercises bas	sed on this chapter	176
References		177

x Contents

Chapter 12 Papers that go beyond numbers (qualitative research)	17	
What is qualitative research?	17	
Summarising and synthesising qualitative research		
Nine questions to ask about a qualitative research paper	184	
Conclusion	19	
Exercises based on this chapter	193	
References	192	
Chapter 13 Papers that report questionnaire research	19	
The rise and rise of questionnaire research	19	
Ten questions to ask about a paper describing a questionnaire study	190	
Exercises based on this chapter	205	
References	200	
Chapter 14 Papers that report quality improvement case studies	208	
What are quality improvement studies and how should	201	
we research them?	208	
Ten questions to ask about a paper describing a quality	21/	
improvement initiative	210	
Conclusion	217	
Exercises based on this chapter	217	
References	218	
Chapter 15 Papers that describe genetic association studies	220	
The three eras of human genetic studies (so far)	220	
What is a genome-wide association study?	222	
Clinical applications of genome-wide association studies	225	
Direct-to-consumer genetic testing	226	
Mendelian randomisation studies	227	
Epigenetics: a space to watch	228	
Ten questions to ask about a genetic association study	230	
Exercises based on this chapter	234	
References	234	
Chapter 16 Applying evidence with patients	237	
The patient perspective	237	
Patient-reported outcome measures	239	
Shared decision-making	240	
Option grids	243	
n-of-1 trials and other individualised approaches	244	
Exercises based on this chapter	246	
References		

	Con	tents	xi
Chapter 17 P	Papers on artificial intelligence in healthcare		249
Introduction			249
Artificial intelli	gence		251
Big data			253
Machine learni	ng		254
Generative artis	ficial intelligence: large language and multimodal models		254
Ethical principl	es for the use of artificial intelligence for health	2	255
Appraising artif	ficial intelligence papers: a plethora of checklists		256
Ten questions to	o ask about a paper that reports AI studies in healthcare		260
Summary			264
Exercises based	on this chapter		264
References			265
Chapter 18 E	BM+: the importance of mechanistic evidence		268
What is mechanistic evidence? An example			268
The many types	of mechanistic evidence and a preliminary hierarchy		269
EBM+ means 'b	ooth and', not 'either or'		270
Mechanistic evi	dence in the COVID-19 pandemic		272
Exercises based	on this chapter		275
References		2	276
Chapter 19 P	apers that report consensus exercises	:	278
Why are consen	isus method papers important?		279
How do experts	choose and reach consensus on a specific topic?		279
Consensus meth	nods		281
Ten questions to	ask about a paper that reports a consensus statement	2	285
Exercises based	on this chapter	2	290
References		2	291
Chapter 20 C	riticisms of evidence-based healthcare	2	293
What's wrong w	ith evidence-based healthcare when it's done badly?	2	293
What's wrong w	ith evidence-based healthcare when it's done well?	2	296
Why is 'evidence	e-based policymaking' so hard to achieve?	2	299
Exercises based	on this chapter	3	301
References		3	301
Appendix 1 C	hecklists for finding, appraising		
ar	nd implementing evidence	3	804
Appendix 2 A	ssessing the effects of an intervention	3	16
Index		3	17