

Introduction: the editors' goals and plans

There is an unprecedented demand for scientific evidence in child and adolescent mental health. Clinicians are under pressure to keep up to date and demonstrate that their decisions are based on the best available evidence. Families are hungry for information about their children's difficulties and what they can do to help or get help. Similarly, policy-makers and health service commissioners need a rational basis for prioritising service developments.

Electronic tools, such as the Internet, offer immediate access to a huge and rapidly expanding child and adolescent mental health literature. Without a critical guide there is a danger of being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information.

Finding the Evidence is a unique type of publication, with three main aims: first, to identify the best available scientific evidence, second, to promote critical appraisal, and finally, to be scrupulously up to date. In essence, *Finding the Evidence* aims to promote evidence-based practice by providing the best available evidence where possible on the topics covered.

As in the first edition, the second edition of *Finding the Evidence* was compiled using two methods to select the evidence. First, electronic search strategies were applied to identify all relevant systematic reviews, meta-analyses and practice parameters or clinical guidelines. Second, experts were asked to choose (non-systematic) reviews, cutting edge and classic papers and books. The introductory sections are a new addition to the second edition.

As the term implies, systematic reviews weigh the evidence using systematic criteria to minimise error and bias. Meta-analyses merge and re-analyse the results of studies that are sufficiently similar and robust. Clinical guidelines should be systematically developed for use in specific clinical situations.

High-quality systematic reviews, meta-analyses and clinical guidelines are, scientifically, extremely valuable. Unfortunately, this type of systematic evidence is very limited in the child and adolescent mental health literature. For this reason, we have included all the systematic reviews, meta-analyses and clinical guidelines found (see comments below about critical appraisal and future editions).

Readers are invited to let us know about any systematic reviews, meta-analyses and clinical guidelines we have overlooked. (There is a form at the back of the book, or contact us at FOCUS.)

To explore the literature further, we have taken advice from researchers, academics and practitioners with a special interest in each field. This has been the basis on which we have selected reviews, where the evidence has been weighed on the basis of the author's personal opinion, rather than explicit systematic criteria. Cutting edge papers present important new theories and evidence, while classic papers are landmark publications of enduring interest. We also posed two critical questions to the experts, which we hope will be useful in highlighting pertinent issues in the field.

Not all topics fit neatly into this framework and we have been flexible where appropriate. For example, we have used very different headings for the section on consent to treatment. Scientific evidence is developing much more quickly and is far more advanced in some areas. Thus, while a paper on suicide published in 1996 is

considered a classic, the scientific literature on music therapy is at a much earlier stage of development. We have been extremely fortunate in receiving advice from internationally renowned experts and in some areas advice from more than one expert. We are keen to extend the range of expert advice in the future.

No list can be exhaustive and *Finding the Evidence* points readers in the right direction. Part 1 provides guidance on finding evidence, while Part 2 presents the evidence on individual conditions, treatment approaches, emerging data-sets, and service development and legal issues.

All evidence needs to be critically examined, and Appendix ii provides a range of critical appraisal tools. Future electronic editions will include our own critical appraisals of the systematic reviews, meta-analyses and cutting edge papers cited in the book, using published criteria.

We are committed to keeping *Finding the Evidence* up to date, by continually renewing the searches, adding to the expert advice and acting on the suggestions of readers. The first edition of *Finding the Evidence* is already available at <http://www.focusproject.org.uk> (go to 'Completed work and available resources') and we hope to update this version with new material every six months. We are presently arranging for the cited articles to be critically appraised, and the electronic version will then contain the critical appraisals as they are completed. Ultimately, we hope that full text articles will be available using Internet links to the article's publishers.

We are very aware that there are gaps in the subject areas covered. We have tried in this edition of *Finding the Evidence* to include more subject areas than the first edition and will continue to include more subject areas in future editions. We would value readers' views on what to include.

Finding the Evidence will be of most value to clinicians, trainees and policy-makers. However, as more topic areas are covered, *Finding the Evidence* will become more relevant to all disciplines contributing to child and adolescent mental health care, as well as to carers and/or relatives.

We envisage *Finding the Evidence* as a 'living document', evolving to address the growing demand for knowledge and exploit the new opportunities provided by information technology.

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