



Title	Identification and Assessment of Ongoing Trials in Health Technology Assessment Review
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Aim

To assess the importance of ongoing trials in health technology assessment reviews (HTARs) for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and to provide practical recommendations for identifying ongoing trials and assessing their possible impact.

Conclusions and results

Identification of ongoing trials is common in HTARs. Of 32 HTARs, 23 identified one or more ongoing trials. In 8 of the 23, information on ongoing trials was not considered in the evidence synthesis and research recommendations. All 32 HTARs searched for unpublished studies, and/or ongoing trials and/or grey literature and trial registers. The assessment of 6 commonly used trial registers suggested that most registers provided sufficient information for reviewers to decide the relevance of ongoing trials. At times it is difficult to know whether ongoing trials identified from different sources (registers) are the same trials or belong to the same multicenter trials. The ISRCTN (the International Standard Randomized Controlled Trial Number) is the most reliable system, but has not been widely adopted. Qualitative assessment compared major features of completed and ongoing trials. Quantitative methods to assess the impact of ongoing trials include cumulative meta-analysis related methods, fail-safe N, Bayesian data monitoring, and Bayesian interim predictions. The most useful quantitative method may be the Bayesian predictive probability. A case study indicated that the appropriate use of quantitative methods would strengthen findings from narrative assessment of possible impact of ongoing trials.

Recommendations

Searching for ongoing trials in effectiveness reviews should be more thorough and explicit. Conversely, primary researchers, in particular those working with multicenter trials, should label ongoing trials more clearly, preferably by ISRCTN. Qualitative assessment of identified ongoing trials is crucial and informa-

tive. Available quantitative methods could be used to strengthen findings from narrative assessment, although further research and more empirical examples are required. Information from ongoing trials may contribute to syntheses of results, conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Methods

Ongoing trials (or trials in progress) were defined as any trials that have started but where the results are not yet available, or only interim results are available for HTARs. This methodological review included:

1. Assessment of ongoing trials in HTARs completed by the end of August 2002
2. Survey and assessment of trial registers and other sources of ongoing trials
3. Summary and assessment of methods to assess the possible impact of ongoing trials.

Further research/reviews required

Future research is suggested to identify and assess ongoing trials in other systematic reviews of effectiveness of healthcare interventions; existing and new methods for incorporating information on ongoing trials; comparing estimated impacts with the actual results of ongoing trials; and to incorporate findings from the assessment of ongoing trials into decision models.