

# Putting down pooch

Cyril Johanssen chipped away underground for a quarter-century as times changed overhead. Men and their moods didn't occupy his mind. Cyril Johansen inched along in incremental unconcern, pick pick pick, as the bosses slid to oily irresponsibility for their workers. Claimed we didn't live in a mining town but a town with a mine in it. Hack hack hack. Smooth respect to raggedy greed.

Cyril Johanssen had finished with rolling and roaming and big movements. He underscored this in an act of the sea, by being disgorged on our shore one morning in winter. The loner forsook events on the earth's surface and came to an edge. The edge. Nothing. Mattered. Except. One. Thing. His dog, Kip.

I knew about earth's-end-as-magnet, animal love and responsibility. The journey was a gnawing yearn which everybody here tried to placate with different offerings. The love, well, I had my boys now. I couldn't deny them anything. Like a dog.

One Saturday afternoon outside football season, two metal wheels — miner and medico, weeper and reaper — spun out and skidded. Responsibility marked us forever. To loved ones. To patients.

I'd taken Pimpant, the children's German shepherd, for a stroll. Huffing up the mountain was getting harder for both of us. We were resting when the mobile phone jangled.

'Yeah.' Oh no. 'Okay.' *Oh no.* 'I'll meet Cyril at the surgery in about an hour. Don't know if I'll do what he wants, but send him down anyway and we'll see.'

I clicked the phone case shut and turned from the pitted peaks punching into a lunar distance. 'C'mon, boy. Going down'll be easier.'

And it was, but walking alone across to the surgery gave me a ba-a-a-d feeling. Men. Dogs. Boys. Dogs. Soulmates. Pain.

A glance at Cyril's file telescoped his 30-year medical history. A mongrel puppy found him when he retired from the mine after 15 years. My predecessor never

mind that that the old miner brought Kip to the surgery: 'It amuses the children and makes Cyril happy, so why not?'

Why not, Round Two. What was right became sinister. Something would be left behind shortly that would pit the earth-edge lunar hills in perpetuity.

The bell above the surgery door tinkled, its feathers of sound too insubstantial a scaffolding for the drama about to be erected. Bring on the gongs. Organ. Ding dong avine calling. In jerked a tough old bird with a miner's body: compact and low to the ground, nuggetty, so he wasn't always bumping his knees and head on rock faces. No gravity pulled Cyril forward, despite all those years spent eroding earth from inside. Only one thing rounded those shoulders: the load he bore like an offering, forearms extended and parallel, palms cupped. He wept over his mutt, silently, except for the odd uncontainable squawk.

What had I been thinking? I must be mad. We went into the treatment room and arranged his burden — not that the old miner saw it as such — on the examining table. Cyril murmured and caressed, broken-hearted.

'Doc, I finally decided.' He looked away, eyes streaming. 'Kip's so crippled up with arthritis he can't move on his own anymore. It's time. Could you help us out? Please?' He barked the last word so brutally I nearly started bawling myself.

'Why not take him to the vet?' I was more brusque than I intended.

'No, we want you to do it.'

'I don't know, Cyril.'

'He trusts you.'

'I've never had a dog as a patient before.'

I thought about Pimpant's worsening hip dysplasia and wondered when this awful dilemma would clamp its iron claw on our family's shoulder.

'Kip's all I got.' Cyril's lower jaw protruded in that belligerent, bulldog way of old East Londoners.

'I'll just see what the vet has to say, but no promises, mate.'

The old man pulled at his white hair. It grew over his forehead like a peninsula and emphasised the bullet shape of his head. A .22.

I rang my animal colleague. Punch punch punch. 'How do I put down a dog? I've never done it before.' It couldn't be that hard.

It was. Canine anatomy is totally different from ours. You give the dog a big dose of general anaesthetic and he just goes to sleep. Ideally. You try to get it intravenously, but if you can't you go for intraperitoneally, into the abdomen, but that's more painful.

Together we positioned the ancient animal. His master's arms were shaking. Mine could've been steadier.

The dog just gazed up at his master in that way they do, with all that love and trust. Did he know what was coming? I hoped not.

Cyril held Kip the whole time, whispering words I'd rather not repeat. That's between a man and his Maker. Or his dog.

I prepared a syringe of diazepam and tried to find Kip's vein. It was harder than I thought. 'Just hold him still, Cyril, and keep stroking him like that.'

A terrible sob was my answer. The old man could no longer contain the emotional tide.

'Cyril, get a grip! It's not good for him to hear that.' Best not to ponder to whom I was referring. I didn't know how long I could keep my own eyes dry.

I couldn't find a vein. 'You can change your mind at any time Cyril.'

'No no.'

I started to perspire. 'I'm happy to stop.' 'Just do it, doc!'

I tried again.

The dog started whimpering. *Eee eee eee eee eee.*

Tried again.

*Eee eee eee eee eee.*

And again.

My eyes blurred. 'I'll have to do it into the abdomen.'

'I don't care, doc. Just get it over with.'

# Tips and tricks in performing a systematic review

So that's what I did.

'I remember when I first got him, doc. He was such a little mongrel. It was love at first sight.'

I swallowed hard, recalling the day Pimpant bounded into our lives. You try telling your child that he cannot have the puppy he's embracing with all the love of which a 6-year-old is capable. We kept the dog. That was 12 years ago.

For 5 long bloody minutes that dog went Eee eee eee eee eee.

The yelps grew softer — the canine ones, that is. Kip died in pain.

'Can I give you something, Cyril?'

'No no, I got work to do. I'm takin' 'im home with me. He's going out the back.'

I didn't want to know how the miner's tired body could carve out a grave from the grey scree behind his shack. I just wanted the corpse off my hands.

I went home and yapped at the kids for making too much noise and almost kicked the dog.

I'll never do that again. I mean it. When people ask me to put down their animals, I send them to Cyril Johanssen, who's done a total *volte-face*. God knows what the poor man suffered during the 2 months nobody saw him. Whatever it was turned his heart. When his grief released him — or he entered the next phase — Cyril bought a .22 and set himself up as an animal liberator, saying it's quicker and more humane to put a bullet through their heads. Perhaps he's right.

But that's not quite the end of the story. The old miner hates me now. Should I have acted differently? Would Cyril still go to the other doctor and cross the street to avoid me if I had refused to put down his dog?

Now Pimpant's hip dysplasia is so bad he drags his hind legs.

And I'm dragging my feet.

**Susan Woldenberg Butler**

## CHAPTER 3

### *Reference management and identifying search terms and keywords*

Previously<sup>1</sup> you have identified a number of articles that you think should be included in your systematic review. Now begins the process of identifying keywords and keeping on top of the logistics of performing a review.

When performing a systematic review you usually have a large number of references which you need to process and organise. To do this it is worth investing in reference management software mainly because they can handle a very large number of references quickly and efficiently without being plugged into the internet.

Currently there are two styles of reference management software, web-based (for example, Refworks), and my preference; offline packages, (for example, Endnote).

Now begins the process of identifying search terms and keywords. Search terms are words which are included in the search strategy, and they appear in the title and abstract of the article. However, the keywords and MeSH are not so easy to spot, sometimes you can see the author selected keywords which index the articles, but typically the MeSH headings are not visible as they are retrospectively applied. To easily see the MeSH of your article you need the help of your reference management software.

After you have familiarised yourself with your software, you need to locate all your previously identified articles on MEDLINE and import them into your reference database. When importing references it is imperative that you import reference information as well as the keywords/MeSH and the abstract.

The next step is to print your references which must include your title, abstract and keywords/MeSH. To print all of these fields you need to edit the output style in your software and add the abstract and keyword fields to the output. All that's left to do is go through each reference and identify each term in the title and abstract which typifies the content of the article, and reflects your research question.

Next chapter: building a PICO search strategy.

**Adrian Sayers**

## REFERENCE

1. Sayers A. Tips and tricks in performing a systematic review. Preliminary evidence gathering: snowballing and reverse snowballing. *Br J Gen Pract* 2007; 57(542): 759.