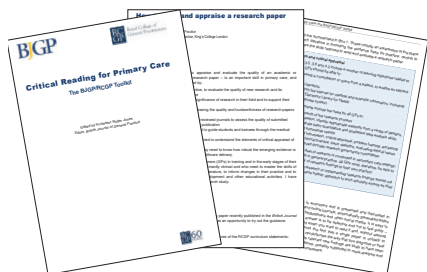


## Editorials

# Critical reading for primary care:

a new resource for readers, authors, and reviewers



At a time when we not only need to base our practice on best evidence but also to carry out research to strengthen the evidence base of practice and policy, the ability to evaluate the originality, relevance, trustworthiness, and importance of published research is more important than ever. With this issue of the *BJGP* we are pleased to announce the launch of *Critical Reading for Primary Care*, a resource available online, that provides advice and guidance on reading, appraising, and evaluating the quality of research articles. Critical reading is, I believe, a very important skill in primary care, and an ability required by many readers. Clinicians, in training and in practice, must be able to evaluate the quality of new research and its relevance to their clinical practice, including primary research articles and also systematic reviews and meta-analyses aimed at distilling the evidence for changing practice. Evidence of appropriate reading and the implementation of published research may become more important as revalidation approaches. For researchers, the skills of critical appraisal are essential to understand the significance of research in their field, support their own article writing, and to evaluate the quality of published articles in peer-reviewed journals.

Editors have the task of assessing the quality and trustworthiness of research submitted to their journal and although we

are supported by dedicated peer reviewers, the editorial antennae need to be informed by a keen awareness of the warning signs of the problematic paper and the criteria for an excellent one. Reviewers, who are asked by peer-reviewed journals to assess the quality of submitted manuscripts and their suitability for publication, need these skills so that their formal assessments of submitted manuscripts, personally attributed in our system of open peer review, are as watertight and helpful as possible. I hope that some of the material in this publication will be a useful reference for them.

Teachers and trainers need to guide students and trainees through the medical literature and we hope that undergraduate teachers in medical schools, both teachers of the core curriculum and those involved in student-selected components, will find this resource useful. Postgraduate educators need to have well-informed discussions with trainees about the strengths and weaknesses of the latest research findings and their possible implications for practice or policy. Students are increasingly expected to understand the elements of critical appraisal of research papers, and policy-makers and managers need to know how robust the emerging evidence is for new methods of treatment and healthcare delivery.

This *BJGP* resource, which has been supported by the RCGP's Clinical Innovation and Research Centre (CIRC), as part of its Research Ready initiative, is based on around 20 articles published in the *Journal* during 2011. With the permission of the authors, we approached all those involved in the peer-review process for these articles and, from these reviewers, selected one or two lead authors for each of the seven main chapters. I have contributed a short introduction, emphasising the importance of critical reading to a wide constituency within primary care, as described above, which is followed by sections on the use of

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quantitative, survey techniques, research using large databases, randomised controlled trials, qualitative research approaches, evaluation of diagnostic tools, systematic reviews, and research involving health economics. The authors of these chapters refer throughout to the published articles, which can be accessed directly from the document via hyperlinks, and also draw on the peer reviews provided for the *BJGP*.

This resource is freely available. I hope that you will find something in it to help you in your reading, writing, reviewing, editing, teaching, and policy making. It may be possible in the future to develop this initiative further, for example by creating an interactive site on which different opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of other published articles could be discussed and debated, a kind of post-publication peer review, which would be valuable to editors and reviewers as well as to authors and readers. Publication is, after all, no guarantee of perfection. We may well expand this resource with the addition of material on topics such as transparency, the reporting of harms as well as benefits, competing interests, prior and salami publication, and negative trials. Your comments on the present document and suggestions for future developments and applications will be gratefully received.

Roger Jones,  
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### Additional information

A PDF of *Critical Reading in Primary Care: The BJGP/RCGP Toolkit* can be downloaded from [www.rcgp.org.uk/bjgp](http://www.rcgp.org.uk/bjgp).

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*"Evidence of appropriate reading and the implementation of published research may become more important as revalidation approaches."*