

# Teaching experienced family physicians EBM approach to practice

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## Introduction

Today's physicians are faced with identifying, evaluating, and applying a huge quantity of medical information. It requires special skills and it has to be learned how to find the most appropriate source of information, evaluate it quickly, and apply it confidently in daily efforts to provide the best care for patients. The results of the interviews indicate that physicians prefer to obtain information from journals and books, but also that they often consult colleagues to get answers to clinical and research questions. Doctors had a low level of awareness of extracting journals, review publications and databases relevant to EBM. Only few of them had access to Medline or other bibliographic databases at their workplaces, most of them had access at their local library or at their home. They also lacked access to the world wide web. For literature searching they mostly used Medline, but usually they asked librarian to do a search on their behalf. The main barrier to practicing evidence based medicine (EBM) in general practice is a lack of time. Data are in accordance with the data of foreign studies.<sup>1,2</sup> The results Slovene family practitioners have also not had much possibilities to learn practically about EBM and are not very familiar with the concept of evidence based medicine so far. So, the objectives of this workshops were also to determine the attitude of general practitioners towards EBM and their related educational needs.

## What is EBM?

It surely is an important change in the way physicians practice, teach and do research. It was initially proposed by Dr Sackett and colleagues at McMaster University in Ontario who define it as: "conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients."<sup>3</sup> Evidence alone is not sufficient for the compassionate, effective care of the patients.

*In EBM there are five steps in solving a clinical problem:*<sup>3</sup>

- 1. Identify a question which needs to be answered.*
- 2. Search for the best evidence with which to answer the question.*
- 3. Critically appraise that evidence for validity and applicability.*
- 4. Apply the results of the appraisal to practice.*
- 5. Evaluate your performance.*
6. Central to an evidence based approach is the ability to ask the right question. Learning how to ask these questions is a skill, and also a habit for lifelong learning.

Thus, using comprehensive and easily accessible preappraised resources is a second strategy for ensuring evidence based care, which makes accessing current best evidence feasible and easy in clinical settings.

## Methods

We have organised four workshops on evidence based medicine with title “Learning and teaching about EBM in general/in family practice” in order to help the participants:

- to understand the logic behind EBM,
- to learn how to use strategies for finding EBM literature,
- to understand EBM in the patient's context,
- to learn how to search for an answer to clinical problems,
- and also to make an audit of own work from the perspective of EBM.

## Description of workshops

We have prepared the workshops in organization of Slovene family medicine Society, which is a non-profit association of family physicians. The society has well designed home page ([www.drmed.org](http://www.drmed.org)) where you can find the program of workshops (international and 4 national). On the home page of the society you can also find variable articles about searching literature and also articles on important information resources in family medicine.<sup>4,5</sup>

Workshops were organised on four different topics (osteoporosis, cancer pain care, cardiovascular diseases, low back pain) in order to present usage of EBM approach on practical cases. Workshops were attended by family practitioners involved in teaching family practice. Workshops were preceded by international workshop held in English. More than 15% of all family practitioners in Slovenia have attended the workshops. They were based on presentations by experts, group work and open discussion in small groups and plenaries. The participants were supplied with course material in advance.<sup>6</sup>

## Resources to facilitate EBM

We have to point out that although many internet resources are available to doctors, only few sites provide information or evidence supported by valid research. Practicing evidence-based medicine involves integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available evidence from systematic research.<sup>3</sup> We have focussed primarily on electronic resources as these are generally easier to search and more current than many print products.

The two EBM databases are **Best Evidence** and the **Cochrane Database**. Best evidence evaluates and briefly critiques individual research articles published in other medical journals and regularly contains summaries of general practice topics. The Cochrane database extensively reviews many articles on a topic. It generates an evaluate summary of the evidence and provides clinical recommendations.

The first stage, and often the only necessary stage, in finding an up to date systematic review of the effects of **health** care interventions is to search the **Cochrane Library**. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR) in the *Cochrane Library* contains a unique, cumulative collection of full text systematic reviews. The Cochrane Library has an increasing number of systematic reviews relevant to general practice.

Books on EBM present common general practice questions, show how to critically appraise papers and to evaluate different sorts of evidence. When full-text databases or collections of summaries are not available the user must step back and search large **bibliographic databases (Medline, CINAHL)**.

Finally, if readers cannot quickly find a recent systematic review on the topic of interest, they should contact an information specialist or librarian.

### **Feedback from participants**

We can not describe how great was the interest of participants and how attentively they listened the lectures. Most of them were asking for additional possibilities to learn more about use of available resources, many wanting to start from very basics - how to use computer and internet. Participants very much liked the approach of mixture of lectures and work in small groups. Such approach is tradition for workshops for family practitioners for more than 15 years. As the interest was so great we have put the material from workshops free on home page of Slovene society of family physicians ([www.drmed.org](http://www.drmed.org)). And most important: as a result special workshop on EBM was included in vocational training of family practitioners.

### **Conclusions**

The focus of workshops on EBM has been on training general practitioners to identify and appraise primary literature, systematic reviews and EBM guidelance or protocols. They thought that this was the most appropriate way to move from opinion based to evidence based medicine.

### **References**

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