**SECTION 1**

### Is the publication reliable?

1. Are the aims clear?

**HINT:** Look for a clear indication at the beginning of the publication of:
- what it is about
- what it is meant to cover (and what topics are meant to be excluded)
- who might find it useful

If the answer to Question 1 is 'No', go directly to Question 3

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2. Does it achieve its aims?

**HINT:** Consider whether the publication provides the information it aimed to as outlined in Question 1

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3. Is it relevant?

**HINT:** Consider whether:
- the publication addresses the questions that readers might ask
- recommendations and suggestions concerning treatment choices are realistic or appropriate

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4. Is it clear what sources of information were used to compile the publication (other than the author or producer)?

**HINT**
- Check whether the main claims or statements made about treatment choices are accompanied by a reference to the sources used as evidence, e.g. a research study or expert opinion
- Look for a means of checking the sources used such as a bibliography/reference list or the addresses of the experts or organizations quoted, or external links to the online sources

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**Rating note:** In order to score a full '5' the publication should fulfil both hints. Lists of additional sources of support and information (Question 7) are not necessarily sources of evidence for the current publication.

5. Is it clear when the information used or reported in the publication was produced?

**HINT:** Look for:
- dates of the main sources of information used to compile the publication

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Accessing and appraising resources

The DISCERN Instrument (cont.)

• date of any revisions of the publication (but not dates of reprinting in the case of print publications)
• date of publication (copyright date)

Rating note: The hints are placed in order of importance—in order to score a full ‘5’ the dates relating to the first hint should be found.

6. Is it balanced and unbiased?

HINT: Look for:
• a clear indication of whether the publication is written from a personal or objective point of view
• evidence that a range of sources of information was used to compile the publication, e.g. more than one research study or expert
• evidence of an external assessment of the publication

Be wary if:
• the publication focuses on the advantages or disadvantages of one particular treatment choice without reference to other possible choices
• the publication relies primarily on evidence from single cases (which may not be typical of people with this condition or of responses to a particular treatment)
• the information is presented in a sensational, emotive or alarmist way

7. Does it provide details of additional sources of support and information?

HINT: Look for suggestions for further reading or for details of other organizations providing advice and information about the condition and treatment choices.

8. Does it refer to areas of uncertainty?

HINT
• Look for discussion of the gaps in knowledge or differences in expert opinion concerning treatment choices.
• Be wary if the publication implies that a treatment choice affects everyone in the same way, e.g. 100% success rate with a particular treatment

SECTION 2
How good is the quality of information on treatment choices?
N.B. The questions apply to the treatment (or treatments) described in the publication.
Self-care is considered a form of treatment throughout this section.
The DISCERN Instrument (cont.)

9. Does it describe how each treatment works?

HINT: Look for a description of how a treatment acts on the body to achieve its effect.

10. Does it describe the benefits of each treatment?

HINT: Benefits can include controlling or getting rid of symptoms, preventing recurrence of the condition and eliminating the condition, both short-term and long-term.

11. Does it describe the risks of each treatment?

HINT: Risks can include side effects, complications and adverse reactions to treatment, both short-term and long-term.

12. Does it describe what would happen if no treatment is used?

HINT: Look for a description of the risks and benefits of postponing treatment, of watchful waiting (i.e. monitoring how the condition progresses without treatment) or of permanently forgoing treatment.

13. Does it describe how the treatment choices affect overall quality of life?

HINT: Look for:
- description of the effects of the treatment choices on day-to-day activity
- description of the effects of the treatment choices on relationships with family, friends and carers

14. Is it clear that there may be more than one possible treatment choice?

HINT: Look for:
- a description of who is most likely to benefit from each treatment choice mentioned, and under what circumstances
- suggestions of alternatives to consider or investigate further (including choices not fully described in the publication) before deciding whether to select or reject a particular treatment choice
Levels of evidence

When examining the written word, consider whether the materials are based on research or opinion. When ideas are presented in published materials, readers often assume them to be factual, but errors can and do occur in publications. Also, published materials can range in quality from editorials and letters to formal research studies involving human subjects. The rigor of any scientific effort significantly affects the reliability and validity of the results of the study and the ability to generalize the results to other populations and settings. Therefore, it is very important to assess the type of article you are reviewing. Determine and critique the research methods using a structured evaluation process (see Chapter 5 for more details on critiquing research articles).