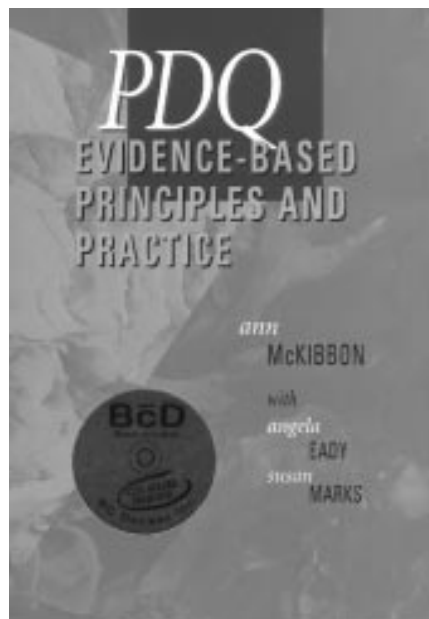


McKibbin A, Eady A, Marks S. *PDQ evidence-based principles and practice*. Hamilton, Ontario, Canada: BC Decker Inc, 1999.



The purpose of this book is to be a “pretty darned quick” guide to the principles of evidence-based health care (EBHC) and to the use of healthcare databases to retrieve methodologically sound studies. The book targets healthcare professionals who might be interested in making EBHC decisions. The main author is a librarian, who shares her many years of experience and expertise as an information retrieval professional.

The text is organised by category of research. Individual chapters cover studies of treatment, diagnosis, aetiology, and prognosis. Systematic review articles, clinical practice guidelines, economic analyses, and qualitative studies are also discussed in separate sections. Each chapter begins with an example of the study design, followed by an introduction to methodology and the qualities of a valid study. A guide to the statistical tools typically used is also provided. Thus, in the treatment chapter, randomisation, blinding, bias, and number needed to treat are all included in the discussion. The explanations are clear and concise, and numerical examples are provided. The core of each chapter consists of lists of index terms and text words that may be used to search each of the 4 major healthcare databases (Medline, CINAHL, PsycINFO, and EMBASE/Excerpta Medica) for methodologically rigorous studies. Critically appraised “hedges,” or optimal search strategies, for searching Medline are also included. The chapters conclude with search exercises for the reader to complete.

The volume comes with a CD ROM, which contains the full text as well as the answers to the searching assignments in 2 separate documents. Both are in Adobe Acrobat format and are therefore accessible to users of most current computer operating systems provided the appropriate software is installed. Acrobat Reader for 16 bit and 32 bit versions of Windows and Macintosh is thoughtfully provided on the disk. The contents of the CD are fully searchable, which greatly enhances the utility of the text as a reference. Unfortunately, the answers to the searching assignments can be found only on the CD ROM. I would have preferred to have had these included in the printed text only, forgoing the digital version. The multitude of included citations, which are reproduced in their entirety, would also not have been missed.

Despite its stated purpose as a quick reference, a surprising amount of historical information is included. Although this makes for interesting reading, I found that it detracted somewhat from the focus of the text.

On the whole, this book is a useful reference. However, while I had hoped to learn some of the trade secrets of an information professional, I was primarily rewarded with long, albeit useful, lists of terms. The included Medline “hedges,” or filters, are already incorporated in the free online PubMed search engine. My overwhelming impression after reading this text was that, despite the increasing accessibility of these large databases, literature searching continues to be overly reliant on fallible human indexers. By using some of the strategies detailed within this book, we may improve the efficiency and yield of our searches but, ultimately, more intelligent search engines are sorely needed.

GAVIN HUI, MD
Halton Healthcare Corporation
Milton, Ontario, Canada

Ratings

Methods/Quality of information: ★★☆☆☆

Clinical usefulness: ★★☆☆☆

PDQ Evidence-Based Principles and Practice can be purchased on-line at <http://www.bcdecker.com/> for US \$27.95. A discount for online orders is offered.