Rapid Review

A rapid review is a type of literature review in which some of the components of a standard systematic review process are omitted in order to simplify the process and produce information within a short time. Alternative terms for a rapid review include Rapid Evidence Review, Rapid Evidence Assessment, Rapid Systematic Review, Expedited Review, Rapid Evidence Summary. The methods used to undertake a rapid review are the same methods used when undertaking a systematic review. However, a rapid review plays a crucial role in speeding up the systematic review process by omitting some of the stages, hence making it less rigorous. It is used as a source to inform emergency decisions on the current state of research in a specific field by stakeholders in health care settings. A rapid review is generally undertaken anywhere from 1 to 6 months and the depths in which a researcher goes into each step of the rapid review process will vary.

Characteristics of a rapid review

- Rapid review enables clinicians, managers and/or policy makers who are time constrained to find the information they require in a timely manner to make evidence-based and informed decisions.
- The components taken from the systematic review process are generally simplified or some parts often omitted in the rapid review process.
- Researchers can use this review process for answering anything from a broad research question, information on new or emerging research, to critical issues within their sector.
- Due to the design of a rapid review approach, researchers need to keep in mind that there is a high probability of limitations such as the search not being comprehensive, potential for bias and omission of key evidence.

Table 1: How does a rapid review differ from a systematic review?

	Rapid review	**Systematic review**
Timeframe	1-6 months	1 year
Resources	May include hand-searching and grey literature	Comprehensive
Searches	May apply limits such as years and language	Comprehensiveness and recommended
Synthesis	Descriptive summary of the findings	Descriptive summary of the findings that may also include a meta-analysis

Stages of a Rapid Review

Timeframe: ≤ 6 weeks (varies). Depends on many factors such as, but not limited to: resources available, the quantity and quality of the literature, and the expertise or experience of reviewers" (Grant et al. 2009)

Question: Narrow question, may use PICO (See Systematic Reviews), PICOT or FINER (Table 2 and 3)

Sources and searches: Sources are limited due to time constraints, however it still uses transparent and reproducible search methods.

Selection: Based on inclusion/exclusion criteria

Appraisal: Critical and rigorous but time limited

Synthesis: Descriptive summary or categorization of data, may still be quantitative

Below are two different useful methods that can be used to guide the rapid review.

Table 2: The PICOT Criteria

P	Population (patients)	What specific patient population are you interested in?
I	Intervention (for intervention studies only)	What is your investigational intervention?
C	Comparison group	What is the main alternative to compare with the intervention?
O	Outcome of interest	What do you intend to accomplish, measure, improve, or affect?
T	Time	What is the appropriate follow-up time to assess outcome?

Table 3: FINER Criteria

F	Feasible	• Adequate number of subjects • Adequate technical expertise • Affordable in time and money • Manageable in scope
I	Interesting	Getting the answer intrigues the investigator, peers, and community
N	Novel	Confirms, refutes, or extends previous findings
E	Ethical	Amenable to a study that International Review Board will approve
R	Relevant	• To scientific knowledge • To clinical and health policy • To future research

Limitations of a Rapid Review

- Search is not as comprehensive
- In some cases, there may only be one reviewer.
- Possible non-blinded appraisal and selection
- Limited/cautious interpretation of the findings
- No universally accepted definition of a "rapid review"
- Be mindful of limitations and potential biases when cutting corners.
- Can impact policy and practice but systematic reviews are still needed
- You still need a content expert and those experienced with systematic review

References

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Compiled by Nontobeku Mthembu, 2021. Revised, 2024.