

“Clubbing” with the EBMs. A brief report by the German Medical Library Association’s working group on EBM

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Abstract

The Working Group on Evidence-Based Medicine (AG-EBM) founded in 2019 within the German Medical Library Association (AGMB) aims to create a space where German-speaking AGMB members, experienced and inexperienced, can meet, share, discuss, collaborate and learn on a voluntary and altruistic basis in the areas of EBM and systematic literature searching. The group is working to establish informal training formats such as journal clubs and workshops. In recent years, the speakers have organised a wide range of virtual training events. The working group meets regularly in-person at the AGMB’s annual conferences.

Key words: *medical libraries; evidence-based medicine; Austria; Germany; Switzerland.*

Introduction

After lively discussions about the role that German medical librarians can play in the field of evidence-based-medicine (1), and following a session entitled “Systematic searching light” at the annual meeting of the German Medical Library Association (AGMB) in 2018, a general feeling remained that the communities of information specialists and medical librarians in German-speaking countries were somehow drifting apart. In order to remedy this situation by providing opportunities for exchange and networking, a working group on evidence-based-medicine (AG-EBM) was officially established within the AGMB in 2019 (2). Since then, three spokespersons have taken care of the organisation of the group, the mailing list and the content of the website https://www.agmb.de/de_DE/ag-evidenzbasierte-medizin. The working group meets regularly in person at the annual meetings of the AGMB.

The Working Group on Evidence-Based Medicine (AG-EBM)

An online survey of medical librarians in Germany, Austria and Switzerland was conducted by one of the speakers on behalf of the group in 2020. The main focus of this survey was to characterise the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that German-speaking medical librarians face when trying to provide or implement systematic review services (2). To meet the needs expressed within the group and in the survey, several online training sessions in German have been organised by the speakers. Educational materials developed by group members have also been compiled and shared through the internal website. Many of these materials are under Creative Commons license, so that other members can reuse and adapt them to their needs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the year 2020 brought unforeseen challenges for the new AG-EBM working group and its speakers. The group’s annual

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meeting, which was intended to facilitate networking through face-to-face meetings and thus reduce barriers, such as asking for individual support when needed, had to be moved to an online-only format. Furthermore, a planned face-to-face training session on literature searching had to be cancelled. Online meetings were quite new territory for most of the group members at the time, but everyone was willing to learn quickly. As a result, the presentation of the group's activities during its first year, the brainstorming on the survey results, and the suggestions for the way forward worked quite well. One of the main positive outcomes of this new experience was the realisation that online meetings were a viable way for the group to stay in touch quite effortlessly. Another positive outcome was the consensus that regular journal clubs were the easiest way to move forward with further training activities in addition to organising formal training events.

In the same year, the speakers launched a series of virtual training events. Two meetings on "Peer Review of a Search Strategy: (PRESS) Guideline" were followed by journal clubs and practical exercises on the "PRISMA Statement" and "De-duplication and updating of search strategies using Bramer's method".

The external training course "Worlds, Tools and Effectiveness" provided informative insights into the use of the Ovid platform for systematic literature searches and the series continued with an "Introduction to Evidence-Based Practice" and "Using systematic reviews in practice - risk of bias in clinical trials". This was followed by a journal club on "Search filters".

"Clubbing" with the EBMs

As the series progressed, the speakers realised that the traditional format of a journal club, in which one person is chosen to analyse and present a paper of interest to the group, followed by a discussion led by the presenter, was not sufficient to encourage lively exchange within the group. They decided on an additional format, which they called the "Survival Club" (the name was inspired by a book called: "The snake bite survivors club", which jokingly became: "Systematic review survivors club" and was eventually shortened to the now official name: "Survival Club" (4). Without discussing a specific paper, but with a set topic, this format provides space for an informal exchange of tips and tricks between experienced colleagues, as well as insights and

help for newcomers to the field of systematic searching and EBM.

Twelve journal or survival clubs have been held so far. Recent topics have included "Citation Tracking", "Keeping up to date", "PubMed Proximity Search" and "Service Forms –the first contact and the basis for initial discussions with our customers". The topics of the sessions are agreed upon by the speakers or suggested by the group members. Presenters either invite experts in the field to attend the clubs and share their knowledge, or in the absence of an expert, the speakers take the lead in the discussion. Slides and other materials discussed, as well as the minutes of the meetings, are posted on the website shortly after the training events. The 2024 calendar is currently filling up. So far, clubs on "Deduplication with Deduklick and other tools", "Evaluation of five different deduplication tools", "GRADE", "Voyant", "Epistemonikos" and "Different types of reviews" are planned. The future club meetings will be listed in EAHIL's TrEDMIL Events Diary and we invite interested EAHIL members to participate as guests at these events.

Invitations to the online clubs are sent to the AG-EBM mailing list one week before the club meetings. In May 2023 there are 79 subscribers to this mailing list. Of course, not everyone interested in the working group can attend all the meetings. Over the year, between 23 and 38 club members have met (admittedly on Mondays, in broad daylight, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon) to share and discuss. The number of participants increased over time, starting with an average of 12 to 13 people at the first online training sessions.

Thanks to the enthusiasm, generosity and willingness to learn of all participants, the AG-EBM "Arbeitsgruppe Evidenzbasierte Medizin" can look back on three very successful years. Membership of the working group can be obtained by simply subscribing the group's mailing list. New members and guests are always welcome.

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