

# Engaging with the Primary Ethics Literature

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**IHE**

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# Two Kinds of Ethics Literature: Descriptive and Normative

## **Descriptive:**

What empirical claims are being made about the technology? How do we know this to be true?

## **Normative:**

How ought we to use the technology? What ought to be considered? Should we be persuaded that this is the right course of action?

# Descriptive/Empirical Research

Collects data to describe actual ethical judgments, practices, and policies of health care organizations, patients and their families, and society.

Can be **quantitative** or **qualitative**

# Descriptive/Empirical Research

What do we mean by “qualitative research”?

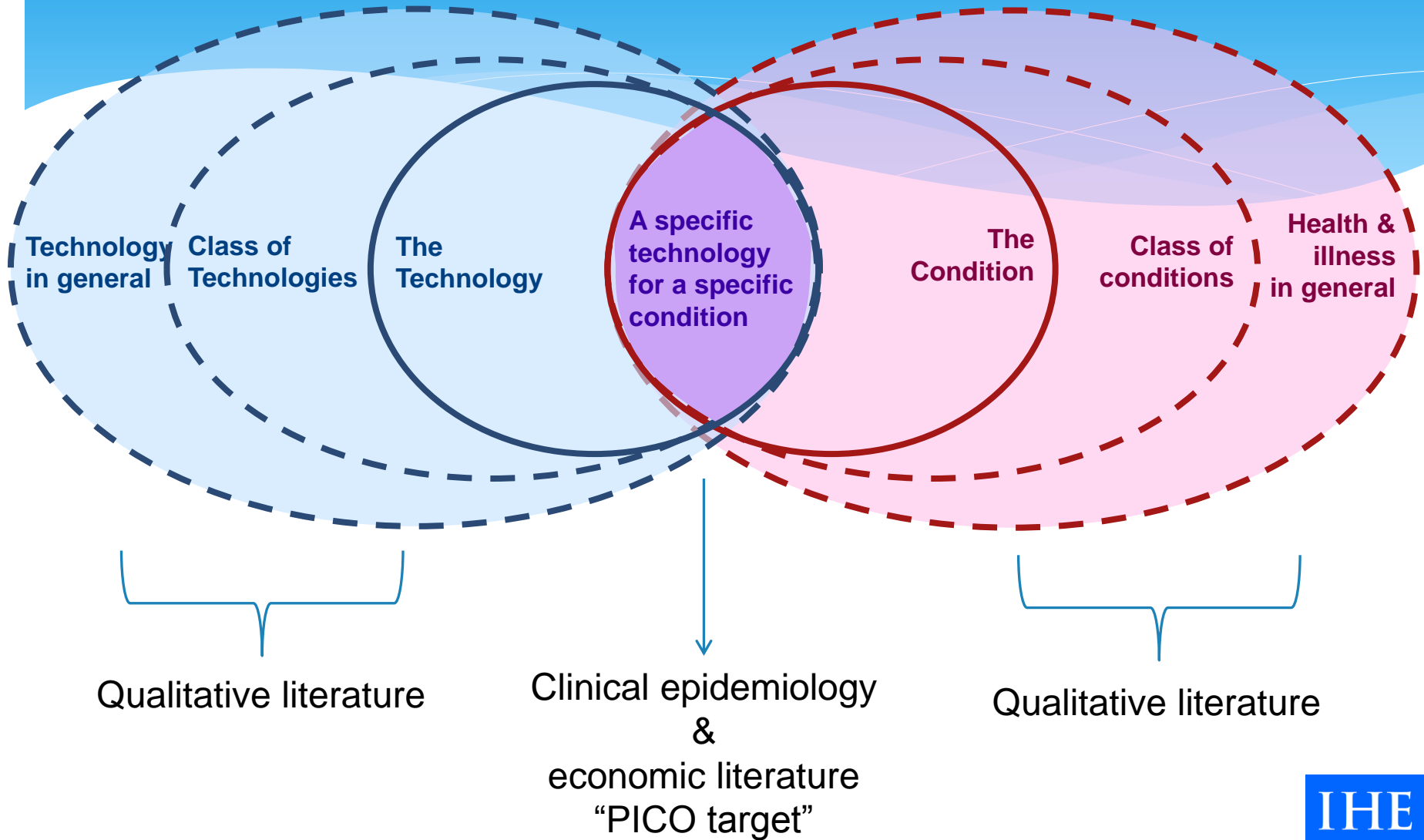
- \* Empirical research
- \* Humans, documents, artifacts
- \* Descriptive or interpretive
- \* Any research paradigm
- \* Use qualitative techniques for sampling, data collection, analysis, interpretation

NOT: surveys, questionnaires

# Searching for the Ethics Literature

Droste et al. Information on ethical issues in health technology assessment. *Int J Technol Assess Health Care* 2010;26(4):441-9.

# Challenge 1: Defining Topic



# Challenge 2: Relevance

Original empirical studies relevant for ethics not always readily identifiable as empirical research in ethics.

May be:

- \* published by a non-ethicist
- \* published in a non-ethics journal
- \* lack an explicit discussion of relevant ethical debates
- \* not indexed using ethics or ethics-related terms.

Ethics depends on social and cultural context and values, national and non-English language ethics databases are important.

# Assessing Rigour

## **Validity**

- \* Was the choice of participants explicit and comprehensive?
- \* Was data collection sufficiently comprehensive and detailed?
- \* Were the data analyzed appropriately and the findings corroborated adequately?

## **Transferability**

- \* Does the study offer helpful theoretical conclusions?
- \* Does the study help me understand the context of my practice?
- \* Does the study help me understand the technology and its effects?

Giacomini M, Cook D, Guyatt G. Therapy and applying the results: Qualitative research. In: Guyatt G, Drummond R (editors). Users' Guides to the medical literature. AMA, 2002.



# Normative Ethics Literature

Reasoned conclusions about how things **ought** to be (relevant concerns and courses of action), rather than empirically based descriptions of how things **are**.

# Normative Ethics Literature

McCullough LB, Coverdale JH, Chervenak FA. Argument-based medical ethics: a formal tool for critically appraising the normative medical ethics literature. *Am J Ob Gynecol* 2004.

1. Does the article address a focused ethics question?
  - a. Does the article address a clearly stated and focused ethical issue or problem?
  - b. Is the issue important and why?
  - c. Is justification for the importance presented?
  - d. From whose perspective is importance claimed?

# Normative Ethics Literature

2. Are the arguments that support the conclusion of the article valid?

What is the quality of the ethical analysis and argument?

Acceptable appeals	Unacceptable appeals
Tradition and current practice	Historic facts
Ethical principles	Majority opinions
General ethical theory	Permitted by law
Casualty	Mere opinion
Reflective equilibrium	Biologic truths
Professional virtues	No right or wrong answer

# Normative Ethics Literature

3. What are the conclusions of the paper's ethical analysis and argument?
  4. Will the results help in policy analysis and recommendation?
    - a. Will the help be practical?
    - b. Will the help be theoretic?
    - c. How should the reader change his or her thinking, attitudes, practices, or policies?
- \* Score each item (0, 0.5, 1) and produce summary score
  - \* No "quality threshold" proposed: 1 "low"? 4 "high"?
  - \* Assessment based mainly on reporting

# Developing a Checklist

Workshop on methodology for ethics in HTA (October 2013)

Edmonton, Canada and Köln, Germany

32 participants from HTA agencies in 10 countries

## CHECKLIST

**Internal:** perspective, assumptions, premises, conclusions, connection between premises and conclusion, objections

**External:** transferability, implications, completeness, bias

# References

CASP checklist for qualitative studies. Available: <http://www.casp-uk.net/#!/casp-tools-checklists/c18f8>

Droste S, Dintsios C-M, Gerber A. Information on ethical issues in health technology assessment: how and where to find them. *Int J Technol Assess Health* 2010;26(4):441-9.

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Mayan MJ. *Essentials of qualitative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009.

McCullough LB, Coverdale JH, Chervenak FA. Argument-based medical ethics: A formal tool for critically appraising the normative medical ethics literature. *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 2004;191:1097-102.

Strech D. How factual do we want the facts? Criteria for a critical appraisal of empirical research for use in ethics. *J Med Ethics* 2010;36:222-5.



THANK YOU!

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