

# **APPRAISING THE PRIMARY ETHICS LITERATURE**

**KEN BOND**

**DIRECTOR, PATIENT ENGAGEMENT AND  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

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What is it that we need to know about this technology in order to be able to judge its value, and what modes of inquiry are likely to provide us with pertinent knowledge that we can trust?

# Judging the Value of Technology

- A person's health condition and their use of a technology are not separable
- A person's life and their use of a technology are not separable
- How a technology is used can impact on benefits and harms, and vice versa
- Help to identify other moderating factors between context and benefits and harms

# ECMO

How much time do parents need in order to make up their minds in situations where ECMO may be considered?

What information is considered the most pertinent by them for making this decision?

What moral dilemmas are experienced by the ECMO teams: preservation of life, avoiding futility, letting die vs. killing?

What arguments for its permissibility/impermissibility have been advanced?

# Ethics Literature

## Descriptive

- Often qualitative
- Survey
- Includes clinical and economic studies
- Includes but not exclusively patient perspective
- Anthropology, sociology

## Normative

- Argument/essay
- Philosophy
- History
- Social Science
- Politics & policy
- Law

# Types of Studies

**Lay of the Land:** Defines current practice, opinions, beliefs, etc. Descriptive or explanatory, hypothesis-driven (or not)

**Ideal versus Reality:** Premise is ethical ideal, assesses extent practice meets ideal (Motivates change)

**Improving Care:** Design and test novel methods to address gaps identified in *Ideal versus Reality* (What works? What doesn't?)

**Changing Ethical Norms:** Bioethics analysis, empirical work informs recommendations of change in norms

Kon AA. The role of empirical research in bioethics. *Am J Bioethics* 2009;9(6-7):59-65.

# Example Journal

## *Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics*

Explores current issues in bioethics through the publication and analysis of personal stories, qualitative and mixed-methods research articles, and case studies.

Articles may address the experiences of patients and research participants, as well as health care workers and researchers.

# Qualitative Inquiry

Statter MB. Just Because You Can—Doesn't Mean You Should. *Narrat Inq Bioeth* 2015;5(1):22-4.

Surgeon's experience helping parents deliberate about appropriateness of use of ECMO for their child.

Snowdon C, Garcia J, Eldbourne D. Reactions of participants to the results of a randomised controlled trial: exploratory study. *BMJ*. 1998 Jul 4;317(7150):21-6

Interviews to assess views of parents of babies who participated in a neonatal trial, about feedback of trial results



# Quality Appraisal

- The process of carefully and systematically examining research to judge its trustworthiness, and its value and relevance in a particular context

([www.whatisseries.co.uk/what-is-critical-appraisal/](http://www.whatisseries.co.uk/what-is-critical-appraisal/))

- Different approach than for quantitative research
- Considerable debate
  - Whether it should be done
  - How it should be done
- Possible to broadly outline criteria

# Appraising Studies

**For ALL empirical studies, concerned about**

- Comprehensive and coherent reporting
- Methodological rigor
- Ethical conduct of research
- Importance or relevance of research

# Quality Criteria

Quantitative Term	What this means?	Qualitative Term
Internal Validity	Is it “true”?	Credibility
External Validity	Is it applicable?	Transferability
Reliability	Is it consistent?	Dependability
Objectivity	Is it neutral?	Confirmability

# Credibility

- Truth value: “is it true?”
- Results fit with the views of participants and observations
- Researchers represent multiple realities comprehensively

Quality Criteria	Techniques
Credibility (Internal validity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prolonged engagement, reflexivity, triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, attention to negative cases, verbatim quotes</li></ul>

# Transferability

- Degree to which results are applicable to other contexts, settings, or groups
- Situational
- Up to the reader, and research user to decide if results are applicable to their context
- Up to the researcher to provide sufficient information to allow the reader to do so

Quality Criteria	Techniques
Transferability (External validity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adequate details so reader can judge<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Setting, context, participants, methods</li></ul></li></ul>

# Dependability

- Degree of consistency if research were to be repeated in a similar context
- Variation in experiences, not identical repetition
- Assessed by trace-ability, logic, and clear documentation

Quality Criteria	Techniques
Dependability (Reliability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Peer review, peer debriefing, audit trail, triangulation</li><li>• Inter-rater agreement?</li></ul>

# Confirmability

- Degree to which results are neutral, and value-free
- Complicated due to researcher as instrument
- Focus on neutrality of data, and not researcher
- Results grounded in data

Quality Criteria	Techniques
Confirmability (Objectivity)	Audit trail, reflexivity

# Some Available Tools

- CASP: Critical Appraisals Skills Programme
  - <http://www.casp-uk.net/#!/casp-tools-checklists/c18f8>
- Prompts for appraising qualitative research
  - Dixon-Woods M, Shaw RL, Agarwal S, Smith JA. The problem of appraising qualitative research. *Qual Saf Health Care* 2004;13:223-5
- Critical Review Form - Qualitative Studies (Version 2.0)
  - [https://www.google.ca/search?q=mcmaster+qualitative+review+form&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&gws\\_rd=cr&ei=PrUGV5CTKan3jgTNwpHoCQ](https://www.google.ca/search?q=mcmaster+qualitative+review+form&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&gws_rd=cr&ei=PrUGV5CTKan3jgTNwpHoCQ)
- Quality Framework:
  - Popay J, Rogers A, Williams G. Rationale and standards for the systematic review of qualitative literature in health services research. *Qual Health Res* 1998;8:341-51



# Quality Assessment of Ethical Argument

## **Acceptable appeals**

Tradition and current practice

Ethical principles

General ethical theory

Casuistry

Reflective equilibrium

Professional virtues

## **Unacceptable appeals**

Historic facts

Majority opinions

Permitted by law

Mere opinion

Biologic truths

No right or wrong answer

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(4):1097-102.

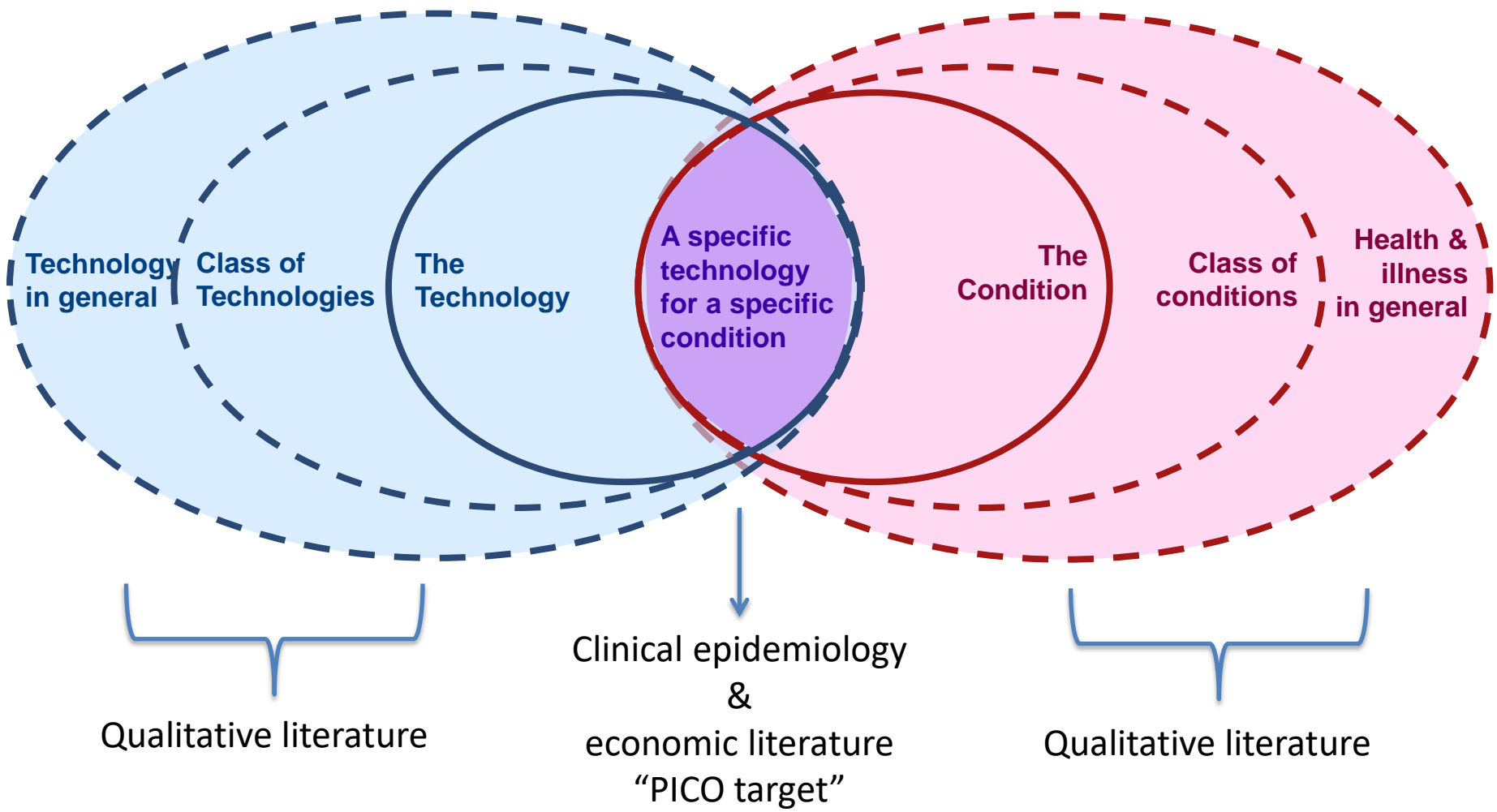
Scott AM, Bond K, Gutiérrez-Ibarluzea I, Hofmann B, Sandman L. Quality assessment of ethics analysis for health technology assessment. *Int J Technol Assess Health Care* 2016;32(5).

- Perspective
- Assumptions
- Premises reasonable
- Conclusions reasonable
- Strength of relationship between premises and conclusion
- Objections identified and addressed
  
- Transferability
- Policy implications
- Completeness
- Bias identified and addressed

# Databases

Name of Database	Provider / Interface	Time period covered
BELIT®	DRZE	1900 - 2008
BIOSIS®	Wolters Kluwer OvidSP	1969 - 2008
CCMED®	DIMDI	2000 - 2008
CINAHL®	EBSCO Publishing	1982 - 2008
Cochrane Database of Methodology Studies (CDMR)®	Wiley InterScience	1993 - 2008
Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR)®	Wiley InterScience	1993 - 2008
EMBASE®	Wolters Kluwer OvidSP	1980 - 2008
Bioethics Research Library at Georgetown University®	Georgetown University	1988 - 2008
EUROETHICS®	European Commission	2002 - 2008
Karlsruher virtueller Katalog®	Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)	---
LEWI®	IZEW	1947 - 2008
LocatorPlus®	NLM	---
MEDLINE®	NLM, Wolters Kluwer OvidSP	1950 - 2008
NHS DARE®	Wiley InterScience, NHS CRD	1995 - 2008
NHS EED®	Wiley InterScience, NHS CRD	1994 - 2008
NHS HTA®	Wiley InterScience, NHS CRD	1988 - 2008
PSYCINFO®	Wolters Kluwer OvidSP	1806 - 2008
PSYINDEX®	DIMDI	1977 - 2008
Publisher Database: Karger	DIMDI	1998 - 2008
Publisher Databases: Springer	DIMDI	1997 - 2008
Publisher Database: ScienceDirect®	Elsevier	1823 - 2008
Publisher Database: Thieme®	DIMDI	2002 - 2008
Science Citation Index Expanded®	Thomson Reuters ISI Web of Knowledge	1945 - 2008
Social Sciences Citation Index®	Thomson Reuters ISI Web of Knowledge	1945 - 2008
SOFIS®	Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences (GESIS)	2000 - 2008

Droste S, et al. Information on ethical issues in health technology assessment: How and where to find them. *Int J Technol Assess Health Care*. 26:4 (2010), 441–449.



What do we want to know about health checks that might be found in the descriptive or normative bioethics literature?

**CADTH** Evidence  
Driven.