

Development of a multi-attribute tool for setting priorities for trials in the musculoskeletal field: A project of the Australia and New Zealand Musculoskeletal (ANZMUSC) Clinical Trial Network

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Background

An explicit understanding of the relative importance of different attributes that contribute to how stakeholders prioritise one research question over another would make this process more transparent and reliable.

Objectives

To develop a multi-attribute priority setting tool for ranking musculoskeletal research questions.

Method

ANZMUSC members completed an online Delphi survey (4 rounds) to elicit attributes that make a research question important. Then a face-to-face workshop involving 22 participants (consumers, clinicians, researchers, funders, health insurance provider), was conducted to agree on a final draft framework for evaluating the importance of a research question and descriptors of categories for each attribute. The final phase will confirm reliable application of the framework, and use discrete choice experiments to develop the scoring system based upon the relative importance (weights) of each attribute and its categories.

Results

66 ANZMUSC members identified 347 determinants of research question importance that were reduced to 32 items with median ratings of at least 7 on a scale of 1 to 9 (indicating definite importance). The final framework includes 6 attributes, each with 3 to 4 categories (total 23): Extent to which the question is important to patients/other health decision-makers, Addresses area of high patient burden, Addresses area of high societal burden, Potential to reduce burden, Potential scalability and uptake of intervention, Extent to which the question addresses health equity.

Conclusions

When completed, this tool is likely to have wide applicability. It will minimise bias and be able to incorporate new topics within a priority agenda when needed.