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Quality over time in health economic evaluations of integrative medicine: an overview of systematic reviews

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - No external financial support.

Review Stage at time of this submission - Preliminary searches.

Conflicts of interest - None declared.

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Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 19 November 2025 and was last updated on 19 November 2025.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective How has the methodological quality of health economic evaluations of therapies from complementary and integrative medicine developed over time?

Rationale Interest in complementary and integrative medicine is increasing (1). As the interest for these therapies grows, cost of treatments becomes an increasingly important factor in healthcare decisions for both patients and decision-makers. Decision-makers want to ensure that treatments are effective, safe, accessible, and cost-effective, especially given rising healthcare costs and limited resources. Initial health economic evaluations on complementary and integrative therapies have shown that these treatments have the potential to improve clinical outcomes without increasing costs, even when used as additional interventions (2). However, the methodological quality of health economic evaluations is essential

to their validity and reliability in healthcare decision-making (3). As early as 2000, the need for high-quality economic evaluations of complementary and alternative medicine procedures was emphasized (4). To address this need, tools such as the Drummond checklist (5) and the Consensus Health Economic Criteria (CHEC) checklist (6) have been developed and are widely used to systematically assess the quality of these evaluations. This overview of systematic reviews of complementary and integrative therapies and their quality assessments provides insight into the methodological quality of economic evaluations of those therapies. It also compares the methodological quality of economic evaluations of different complementary and integrative therapies and shows how it has developed over time. This allows to identify trends and improvements in the economic research of these therapies, as well as areas requiring further methodological refinement.

Condition being studied No specific condition.

METHODS

Search strategy A systematic literature search will be conducted in electronic databases to identify relevant systematic reviews including health economic evaluations of complementary and integrative medicine interventions, alongside quality assessments. The references of the identified systematic reviews will also be screened to find more relevant articles. There are no restrictions on year of publication.

Participant or population This overview of systematic reviews contains no restrictions for the population.

Intervention All interventions of complementary and integrative medicine (i.e. homeopathy, acupuncture, etc.) are eligible.

Comparator All types of comparison groups are eligible.

Study designs to be included Systematic reviews of health economic evaluations are considered. These systematic reviews have been published in peer-reviewed journals.

Eligibility criteria

Systematic reviews that do not use quality assessments are excluded.

Narrative reviews and other overviews of systematic reviews are excluded.

Non-research studies, such as reports, book chapters, and conference proceedings, are also excluded.

Information sources Systematic reviews published in the electronic clinical databases Medline, EMBASE and Science Direct will be searched.

Main outcome(s) Quality assessment for the health economic evaluations of each included study reported in the systematic review.

Additional outcome(s) Type of health economic evaluation (cost-effectiveness analysis, cost-utility analysis, cost-benefit analysis, cost-cost analysis, others) of each included study reported in a considered systematic review.

Perspective of analysis of each included study reported in a considered systematic review.

Intervention and condition being studied in each of the included studies reported in a considered systematic review.

Data management For managing literature and reporting decision-making the literature managing tool Zotero is used. After the literature search and duplicate removal, the titles and abstracts of the identified systematic reviews are screened firstly. In the second phase, the full text of potentially relevant articles are screened. Additionally, the reference lists of the identified systematic reviews are screened to find further potentially relevant article. Screening is performed independently by two authors. Disagreements are discussed until a consensus is reached. Following, these two authors independently extract the data from the included studies into a developed extraction scheme in an excel sheet. Any disagreements are discussed until a consensus is reached.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis -.

Strategy of data synthesis The percentage of fulfillment of the quality assessment criteria is calculated to enable comparison of the different quality assessments used in the included systematic reviews.

Regression analysis is performed to examine how the fulfillment of quality criteria changes over publication time. The goal is to identify any trends, such as an increase or decrease in the percentage of criteria met.

Subgroup analysis No subgroup analyses will be conducted.

Sensitivity analysis No sensitivity analyses will be carried out.

Language restriction English.

Country(ies) involved Deutschland.

Keywords integrative medicine, health economic evaluation, quality.

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