

Developing reporting guidelines for single-case experimental designs: the SCRIBE project

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Background and aims: Standards of reporting the results of research in medical journals have been criticised. As a consequence, guidelines have been developed with the aim of providing an agreed-upon set of criteria to improve reporting. An early guideline was the Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT) Statement for randomized controlled trials. The present report describes the Single-Case Reporting guideline In BEhavioural interventions (SCRIBE).

Method: The SCRIBE evolved directly from a related guideline under development (CONSORT Extension for N-of-1 Trials; CENT). Whereas CENT is intended for multiple cross-over, A-B-A-B designs used in medicine, SCRIBE aims to cover the broader range of single-case experimental designs (SCED) used in the behavioural sciences. To develop the SCRIBE, a set of items was derived from the CENT Statement and a method quality SCED Scale, which were subject to two rounds of a web-based Delphi exercise. Results were discussed at a 2-day consensus conference to develop items for the SCRIBE.

Results: Each of the SCRIBE Steering Committee, Delphi survey and consensus conference had international representation, and included clinicians, educationalists, methodologists, statisticians, medical librarians and journal editors. Results of the 44-item Delphi surveys were discussed at the consensus conference and a final set of 26 items for the SCRIBE was unanimously agreed by conference participants.

Conclusions: The SCRIBE provides a brief and practical ‘user’s guide’ to publishing single-case studies and we anticipate that, as has been demonstrated for the CONSORT Statement, a by-product will be the improved planning and conduct of single-case research.