

Iveta Simera¹, Douglas G. Altman¹, David Moher², John Hoey³, Kenneth F. Schulz⁴

¹Centre for Statistics in Medicine, University of Oxford, UK; ²Ottawa Health Research Institute, Ontario, Canada; ³University of Toronto, Canada; ⁴Family Health International, NC, USA

"If the CONSORT recommendations were followed in the reporting of future studies, the effects of Morita therapy would be clearer. Much important data within the included studies were so poorly reported that clinicians, funders and recipients of care might have reason to feel let down by the research community."

He Y, Li C. Morita therapy for schizophrenia. *Cochrane review*¹



"Improved reporting will enhance accountability and transparency in clinical research and facilitate its translation into evidence-based clinical practice."

Uhlig K, Menon V, Schmid CH. Recommendations for reporting of clinical research studies.²

1. Clarity and completeness of health research publications is not satisfactory

Scientific publications of health research studies often lack crucial information. This represents a problem for all research users and systematic reviewers in particular. Inadequate description of research methods and findings prevents critical evaluation of the quality and relevance of the research, undermines confidence in the results and limits the further use of such research.

Examples of problematic issues in health research reporting include:

- Non-reporting or delayed reporting of whole studies
- Omission of crucial information in the description of research methods and interventions
- Selective reporting of only some outcomes
- Presenting data (graphs) in confusing or misleading ways (particularly important for presenting benefits and harms)
- Inadequate statistical reporting
- Omissions or misinterpretation of results in abstracts

2. Reporting guidelines: tools for improvement of health research reports

Reporting guidelines provide advice on how to report research studies. They are usually in the form of a checklist, flow diagram or explicit text, and specify a minimum set of items required for a clear and transparent account of what was done and what was found in a research study, reflecting in particular issues that might introduce bias into the research. Most widely recognized guidelines are based on the available evidence and reflect consensus opinion of experts in a particular field, including research methodologists and journal editors.

Reporting guidelines complement advice on scientific writing and journals' instructions to authors.

Examples of reporting guidelines include:

- CONSORT (for randomised controlled trials): <http://www.consort-statement.org/>
- STARD (for diagnostic accuracy studies): <http://www.stard-statement.org/>
- STROBE (for observational studies): <http://www.strobe-statement.org/>
- QUOROM / PRISMA Statement (for meta-analyses of RCTs, on the CONSORT website)

3. The EQUATOR Network: helping authors, editors and peer reviewers to improve the clarity and completeness of research reports

The EQUATOR Network is a new international initiative that seeks to improve the reliability of published health research by promoting transparent and accurate reporting.



The screenshot shows the EQUATOR Network website homepage. It features a search bar, navigation tabs (Home, About EQUATOR, Resource Centre, Courses Events, Research Projects, Links, Contact, News), and a main content area with sections for 'Reporting guidelines', 'Authors', 'Editors', and 'Developers'. A 'Latest news' section highlights a workshop and a new reporting guideline. Logos for NHS and MRC are visible at the bottom.

The EQUATOR Network has five major goals:

1. Develop a comprehensive internet-based resource centre providing up-to-date information, tools and other materials related to health research reporting
2. Assist in the development, dissemination and implementation of robust reporting guidelines
3. Actively promote the use of reporting guidelines and good research reporting practices through an education and training programme
4. Conduct regular assessment of how journals implement reporting guidelines
5. Conduct annual audits of reporting quality across the health research literature

The EQUATOR Network collaborates closely with journals, reporting guideline developers, educators and research funders. Many journals now link to the EQUATOR resources in their 'Instructions to Authors' and a growing number of visitors access the EQUATOR website.

In order to reach their potential, reporting guidelines need to be used widely and routinely by researchers, editors and peer reviewers.

The EQUATOR Network can substantially contribute to the prevention of poor reporting and introduction of best reporting practice by leading a global collaboration between the research and publishing communities. This effort needs to be strongly supported by research funders and regulatory bodies.

References:

1. He Y, Li C. Morita Therapy for Schizophrenia, *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2007, Issue 1, Art. No.: CD006346, DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD006346.
2. Uhlig K, Menon V, Schmid CH. Recommendations for reporting of clinical research studies. *Am J Kidney Dis* 2007;49:3-7.

The EQUATOR Network Steering Group:

Prof Douglas G. Altman, Director, Centre for Statistics in Medicine, University of Oxford, UK
 Dr John Hoey, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada
 Dr David Moher, Ottawa Health Research Institute, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
 Dr Kenneth F. Schulz, Vice president, Quantitative Sciences, Family Health International, NC, USA

Head of Programme Development:

Dr Iveta Simera, Centre for Statistics in Medicine, University of Oxford, UK
 Contact: iveta.simera@csm.ox.ac.uk