

Lay summary on:

Conceptualizing clinical expertise in evidence-based practice: a narrative literature review with implications for clinical decision-making



Ontario
Chiropractic
Association

Research summary of a peer-reviewed narrative literature review



What is this research about?

Although clinical expertise is fundamental in clinical decision-making, it's often undervalued and overlooked in research. Without clear guidance on how clinical expertise develops or functions in real-world care, rigid evidence hierarchies risk being over-relied on – potentially undermining the skilled judgement clinicians use to combine research with patient needs and individual situations.

This review takes a closer look at how clinical expertise is defined, develops, and fits within Evidence-Based Practice (EBP). It offers practical insights for clinicians and educators to help them apply their expertise more effectively in everyday practice.



How was this research conducted?

The research team conducted a narrative literature review of articles published between 2016 and 2024 that explored how clinical expertise is defined, developed, and used within EBP. Searching three scientific databases and screening 1,992 potentially relevant articles, they identified 23 relevant articles. Key themes were summarized across different health professions to better understand how clinical expertise supports decision-making in EBP.

What did the research team find?

Three themes emerged from this review:

1

How clinical expertise is defined in research:

- The ability to integrate research evidence into clinical decision-making with patients' preferences, clinical context, and one's own professional judgement.
- A lifelong, evolving process.

2

How clinical expertise develops:

- Through hands-on clinical experience with diverse patients and reflecting on outcomes.
- Through mentorship and peer learning.
- Through collaboration with researchers and experts from other disciplines.
- By staying curious, adapting, and avoiding rigid habits.

3

Why clinical expertise matters in decision-making:

- Research alone doesn't always fit a patient's situation.
- Clinicians use their expertise to interpret evidence and integrate it with patient-specific factors, personalizing care to improve outcomes.

What does this all mean?



Clinical expertise is more than experience – it's an EBP skill that involves combining research, patient needs, and clinical context to make the best care decisions. Like any skill, expertise can be developed and supported throughout a clinician's career. Within EBP, clinical expertise is what balances and integrates all other factors involved in a care decision. Recognizing its value helps ensure that care stays effective, personalized, and grounded in both evidence and patient trust.



Definitions:



Haynes' model of Evidence-Based Practice (EBP):

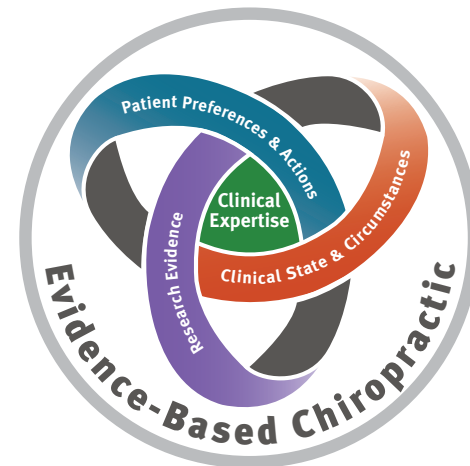
A health-care model that supports clinical decisions by integrating research evidence, patient preferences and clinical circumstances – guided by clinical expertise to improve patient outcomes.

Clinical expertise:

The knowledge, reasoning and skill that clinicians develop through education, experience, and reflection over the course of their careers.

For more information:

Visit the Ontario Chiropractic Association (OCA)'s [Evidence-Based Chiropractic Care \(EBCC\)](#) for more research findings in a paper series that explores how chiropractors can integrate research evidence, clinical expertise and patient preferences to deliver high-quality care.



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