



**EVIDENCE-BASED MEDICINE**  
**Come praticare e insegnare**  
**la medicina basata sulle**  
**prove di efficacia**

Sharon E. Straus, W. Scott Richardson, Paul Glasziou, R. Brian Haynes.  
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*Evidence-based medicine. How to practice and teach EBM* by Straus, Richardson, Glasziou and Haynes, at its third edition in 2005, is now available in the Italian translation, published by Il Pensiero Scientifico Editore.

This book offers an interesting perspective on the main critical points of evidence-based medicine (EBM). After an introduction on the principal features of EBM (meaning, historical traits, develop-

ment, arguments pros and cons), the authors pass to examine how to formulate meaningful questions from a clinical point of view. This activity is crucial, straight affecting the formulation of appropriate researches for the best evidence. Subsequently, the authors face how to evaluate and rank results of such researches according to their validity and importance. Finally, they give suggestions on strategy to integrate knowledge based on EBM with patients' preferences. The latter is a very important topic. Indeed, one of the criticisms more often addressed to EBM is that it promotes a cookbook approach to medicine, ignoring individual clinical expertise and values and preferences of patients. In a shortsighted application of EBM it may be true: on the other hand, an excessive confidence on individual clinical experience, with no attention to advances in medical knowledge, may be much more dangerous, above all when considering the very rapid obsolescence of such knowledge.

The book is especially addressed to health care professionals, who are interested either in introducing EBM in their own practice or in teaching it to the younger generation. Thus, the last two chapters are dedicated to teaching methods and to self-evaluation.

Two appendixes complete the book. The former gives a useful survey on confidence intervals (statistical topic) which are indicated, in reason, as the best way to present effect estimates. As a statistician, I have particularly appreciated the table containing formulas for the computation of confidence intervals for the most widely used indexes. My only criticism from a statistical point of view is about the formulas for the computation of positive and negative predictive values of diagnostic tests, PPV and NPV, in the chapter on Diagnosis and Screening. Formulas given by the authors are indeed appropriate only in case of a sample randomly extracted from the reference population, with no selection of subjects based on the presence or absence of the pathological condition under study. In case of rare diseases, it is usual to extract separately the two samples of diseased and healthy subjects. Thus collected data cannot be used to estimate the prevalence of the disease in the reference population, and formulas for PPV and NPV must be modified accordingly.

The second appendix is a glossary, including terms more likely to be met in reading clinical literature.

In all chapters, the authors schematize arguments in tables, which are very useful for a rapid memory recall. User-friendly pocket-size cards, schematising all main topics presented in the book, are also given. The package is completed by a CD-ROM, which presents various clinical scenarios, allowing the reader to extrapolate concepts and strategies to different situations. Finally, the book is supported by a website, whose goal is to help develop, disseminate, and evaluate resources that can be used to practise and teach EBM for undergraduate, post-graduate and continuing education for health care professionals from a variety of clinical disciplines.

As authors say, the aim of the book is to provide the reader with advices and instruments to practice EBM in real time. Time is indeed the main constraint for the continuing education of health care professionals. Whatever the country (and the Italian National Health Service does not make an exception), health care professionals are stifled by a chronic shortage of time, due to the large number of patients to be visited daily. This often makes doctors having only few minutes to examine each patient (above all in outpatients' departments). In this situation, education is often postponed, when not neglected. Thus, authors pay a special attention to all instruments which can help practitioners to save time in their education, *i.e.* "how to find current best evidence and have current best evidence find us". Among authors' suggestions, health professionals should ask for help to colleagues, pharmacists, or even patients: the latter may be suggested to come back to visit one week later, to allow doctors to deepen medical knowledge on the specific clinical condition and cures. These suggestions seem to be hardly applicable in the Italian situation: hospital and outpatients' department waiting lists are usually so long to prevent such a deferment.

In spite of some flaws, in my opinion the book can be very interesting and useful to sensitize all people professionally dealing with EBM at any level, that is not only health care professionals, but also researchers in medical fields, project and program evaluators, statisticians. Finally, even people who are simply interested in learning or improving knowledge on EBM (for instance, to be able to critically interpret scientific or divulgatory articles on medical topics) can well profit by this book.

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