

Analysis of the Rural Health Literature Indexed in PubMed and in the Rural Assistance Center Documents Index

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Methods

The National Library of Medicine's PubMed and the Rural Assistance Center's documents index are free, web-based article indexes that cover rural health topics. Our study examines the coverage of rural health issues in these two article indexes. We compared search results in each system for a set of questions on rural health administration, rural health care services, and rural health statistics. Thirteen questions were developed based on a review of queries answered by Rural Assistance Center staff, in consultation with rural health experts. We reviewed the first 40 hits for PubMed and for the Rural Assistance Center documents index for currency (year 2000 or more recent) and relevance to the question. Selected documents for each search system were compared to identify any overlap in the result sets. The number of relevant articles for each question was compared for PubMed and the RAC documents index. The percentage of relevant results within the first 40 hits were calculated for each question and each database.

Overview of Indexes

PubMed

- 15 million+ citations
- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Entire biomedical literature
- International scope
- 1950s to present

RAC Documents Index

- 2,500+ citations
- Fugitive (grey) literature
- Rural health & human services
- Focused on U.S.
- Mid-1990s to present

What is Fugitive Literature?

Fugitive, or grey, literature includes publications such as working papers, fact sheets, newsletters, state and federal government reports that are not available through peer-reviewed or commercial publishing. The growth of the Internet has made these materials available electronically to a wide audience, but you can't use what you can't find. The RAC Documents Index pulls together fugitive literature from a wide range of sources, facilitating access to the grey literature for rural health.

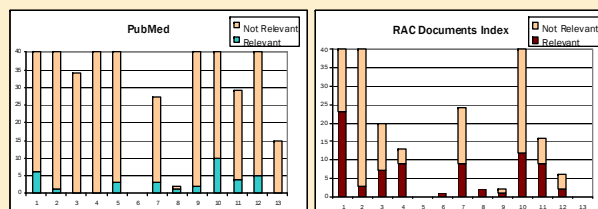
Search Questions

	PubMed	RAC
Rural Health Administration		
1) What recruitment and retention strategies are used in rural health care facilities?	6	23
2) How do hospital profit margins compare for rural versus urban hospitals?	1	3
3) What types of capital funding needs exist in rural hospitals and clinics?	0	7
4) What level of access to OB and prenatal care is available in rural areas?	0	9
5) Does the use of electronic medical records improve patient outcomes in rural areas?	3	0
Rural Health Care Services		
6) How can rural primary care providers recognize alcohol abuse in women?	0	1
7) What strategies can be used to address obesity in a rural setting?	3	9
8) What ethical issues exist in rural mental health care?	1	2
9) How can rural health care providers promote health literacy?	2	1
10) What are rural patient safety issues?	10	12
Rural Health Statistics		
11) Data on the rural uninsured	4	9
12) Rates of HIV and other STDs in a rural setting	5	2
13) Rural incidence of suicide	0	0

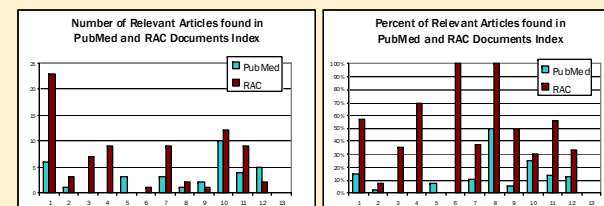
In Search of Relevance

Relevance is a measure of how closely an item, such as an article or publication, matches the information needs of the user.

Relevant vs. Non-Relevant



Search Results



Conclusions

	Strengths	Limitations
PubMed	Access to peer-reviewed articles	International focus weighs down rural health searches
RAC Documents Index	Access to grey literature Focus on U.S. and rural health	Newer database with smaller backfile of publications
Both Databases	Cover distinct bodies of rural health literature	Limited coverage of rural mental health and substance abuse issues

- There was no overlap in relevant articles found in PubMed and the RAC Documents Index. Each index represents distinct bodies of literature. Consulting both indexes can ensure a comprehensive search of the rural health literature.
- RAC's focus on the U.S. makes it especially useful to those working to address issues related to our health system. PubMed's international focus results in many articles addressing rural health in other countries.
- RAC Documents Index focuses on rural health. Therefore, rural health researchers are likely to find a higher percentage of results relevant to their needs compared to results from a similar PubMed search.
- Several questions resulted in few or no relevant articles. These questions highlight gaps either in the coverage of the RAC documents index or the content of the rural health literature. RAC is addressing these gaps by identifying additional articles on these topics.
- The RAC documents index is particularly useful for rural health care administration questions but also includes articles on rural health care services and rural health statistics.