

# Keeping Up with the Standards

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There has been a not-so-silent revolution in research over the last decade. Though researchers had been publishing guidelines and decrying the disarray or lack of uniform design standards for some time, evidence-based guidelines to help direct research design and publication are relatively new. The first major undertaking was CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials), published in 1996.<sup>(1)</sup> It has seen updates in 2001 and 2010. The *IJTMB* has always recommended that authors follow the CONSORT statement when submitting research manuscripts. There are many reasons for doing so, amongst the chief reasons being that it ensures thoroughness of reporting and inclusion of information needed both for understanding and assessing the research, and for facilitating comparisons between similar studies and meta-analysis of study results. In my editorial of December 2012,<sup>(2)</sup> I was pleased to bring attention to the CONSORT extension for nonpharmaceutical interventions,<sup>(3)</sup> where an extension identifies specific additional items that provide a nuanced application of the primary guideline, as the extension is applicable to therapeutic massage and body work research. I also recommended at that time that, in the absence of internationally supported and developed protocol development guidelines, such reporting guidelines can provide concise direction to the development of protocols, though the design-specific details must still be provided by the researcher. In 2013 the first major reporting guideline for protocols was published, SPIRIT (Standard Protocol Items: Recommendations for Interventional Trials).<sup>(4)</sup> While still a reporting guideline, it is better suited for providing a thorough framework for developing a research protocol.

The extension for nonpharmaceutical interventions is just one of many extensions being developed for CONSORT, and parallel reporting guidelines have been developed, such as for systematic reviews (PRISMA), qualitative research (COREQ), and recently case reports (CARE) and the SPIRIT guideline. Each of these may have extensions. While the *IJTMB* author guidelines have continued to recommend the use of these guidelines, the 2014 version highlights two important changes:

1. The *IJTMB* no longer recommends authors use the appropriate guideline, but expects authors to use them. Increasingly the *IJTMB* editors are holding authors to that standard, like many other peer-reviewed medical journals. This has the effect of assisting the publication of transparent, high-quality research, while providing direction to authors on what to include in a well-written research manuscript.
2. The *IJTMB* no longer lists all the guidelines available. The EQUATOR Network was launched in 2008, with a website shortly thereafter (<http://www.equator-network.org>), to help organize work on reporting guidelines, create awareness around reporting guidelines, and to support further work in reporting guidelines. The website now list 276 guidelines!<sup>(5)</sup>

Though the publishing of these guidelines is now well established, it is still important to raise awareness about new guidelines, and help increase awareness and uptake of all of them. The EQUATOR Network website is the preeminent repository of publishing guidelines. However, there are other guidelines, recommendations, and evaluations of outcomes available that relate directly to the development of research; unfortunately, there is no similar singular coordinating site. I would encourage anyone undertaking research in an area to start with a search for these critical documents, not just for the published research relevant to their project. To that end, an *IJTMB* reader alerted me about a report on research standards in low back pain. Because low back pain is an important area of TMB research, the *IJTMB* invited the authors of the report to republish the standards in our Journal (common practice for standards and guidelines). I encourage anyone undertaking low back pain research to carefully consider the recommendations in this report.

Enjoy both the report, and the studies published in this issue.

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