

The Priority Updates from the Research Literature (PURLs) Methodology

PURLs

Priority Updates from the Research Literature (PURLs) is a product of the Family Practice Inquiries Network (FPIN) designed to alert practicing physicians about new discoveries that could cause them to change their practice.¹ The purpose of PURLs is to leverage an organized surveillance system to rapidly scan a large amount of medical literature relevant to primary care, identify the small percentage of that literature that represents a potential change in practice, and succinctly summarize that evidence for busy clinicians. The purpose of this paper is to illuminate the rigorous process by which FPIN identifies, evaluates, and publishes a PURL.

The Nominations Listserv

The identification of a potential PURL starts with the PURLs Nomination Listserv. This listserv is a group of highly motivated family physicians interested in new research that could represent practice changing findings. The listserv is administered by an FPIN staff member and the PURLs Editor-in-Chief (EIC). Volunteers from this group agree to monitor a group of medical journals that are likely to publish finding relevant to practicing family physicians. With a relatively small number of volunteers, a large amount of new primary care literature can be monitored on a regular basis.

When one of these volunteers, or any member of the listserv, identifies a new paper that they believe may represent a potential change in practice, they can nominate it on the listserv by posting the abstract and seeking comment. The nomination is then debated among listserv participants regarding its strengths and weaknesses, its validity, its generalizability, and its practice changing potential. Nominations that are deemed to have enough potential based upon a robust discussion of the abstract are considered potential PURLs and designed for an in-depth review.

PURL Jams

Potential PURLs are assigned to one of a handful of family medicine residencies for systematic review at events call "PURL Jams". A PURL Jam can be thought of as a highly structured and rigorous journal club. PURL Jams are led by a local expert in evidence-based medicine and include a small number of faculty and residents. In addition to a thorough evaluate of the paper in question, PURL Jams represent a valuable learning experience of the participants as they practice critical appraisal of the literature.

The member(s) of each PURL Jam utilize a structured Potential PURL Review Form (PPRF) to evaluate the article in question. There are individually created PPRFs designed to systematically review a wide variety of types of medical literature (for example randomized controlled trials, meta-analyses, or case-control studies). The PPRF guidelines assist members of the PURL Jam through a series of questions about the paper towards the ultimate goal of determining whether or not it meets the PURLs criteria.

[Table 1](#) explains the PURLs criteria. Only if all six of these criteria have been met, can a paper potentially be declared a PURL.

The members of the PURL Jam create two documents by the end of the session. The first is the completed PPRF. The second is called a Diving for PURL form (DfP), which is a brief synopsis of the conclusion made during the Jam and a “YES/NO” determination on all six PURLs criteria. These forms are sent to the PURLs EIC for review.

Peer Review

The EIC may send them back for further editing or clarification. Once the EIC is satisfied with the documents, they are sent out for peer review. The peer reviewers utilized in this stage have experience with PURL Jams and are familiar with the PURLs criteria. Just like any peer review process, reviewers’ comments are return to the author for revision. Once the EIC is satisfied with peer review, the product is ready for publication. As of now, there are two journals that publish PURLs, *The Journal of Family Practice* and *Evidence-Based Practice*.

Publication

Nominations that do not meet one or more criteria are still published as a Diving for PURLs. This is so readers can still gain knowledge from the efforts made and can understand why a particular article does not represent a practice changer. Nominations that go through the entire process and meet all six criteria are published as PURLs.

The format that PURLs are published as are an easy-to-read synthesis of the standardized review process. Published PURLs review the evidence and explain why the findings are compelling enough to warrant providers changing their practice. The PURL goes through an additional round of peer review with the journal prior to final publication.

The final product then has undergone a thorough and rigorous evaluation process that includes scrutiny by a listserv of engaged readers, a small group following a stepwise guide, two editors, and two rounds of peer review. The end product is a brief, easy-to-read synopsis of the evidence that can have an immediate impact on patient care.

REFERENCES

1. Ewigman B, Susman J. PURLS--translating research into reality. *J Fam Pract.* 2007;56(12):981-3. PMID: 18170951