

# Experiences from a previous project: A literature review

Erik T Løhre

Regional Advisory Unit for Palliative Care  
Cancer Clinic, St. Olav University Hospital & NTNU

## Outline

- What to do?
- Why do it?
- How to do it?

- Rationale
- Research question
- Methods
- A complete paper aims to answer:
  1. Why did you start? I
  2. What did you do? M
  3. What did you find? R
  4. (And) What does it mean? AD

## Specific rationale

- There seemed to be a lot of different ways of applying palliative radiotherapy for spinal cord compression
- Single fraction radiotherapy had proven efficient for painful bone metastases
- What would be the situation for spinal cord compression?

## How to get started

- Get an overview on the topic
- Preliminary literature search
  - What is already known?
  - Is your preliminary research question already answered?

## Research Question

- Is it scientifically evident to recommend hypofractionated regimens in the treatment of spinal cord compression, and if so, to which cohort of patients?

## Methods

- Put in some work here
- Consult a librarian
- Where to look: Pubmed, Embase, Cochrane Library (suited my purpose)
- Search string, relevant synonyms/expressions (metastatic spinal cord compression/epidural spinal cord compression)
- MeSH (Medical Subject Headings): sets of terms in a hierarchical structure

## Results

- Present in a systematic manner: RCTs, other prospective studies, retrospective studies, systematic literature reviews
- Systematic reviews and meta analyses hold the most distilled knowledge
- But often omit studies other than RCTs

## Results

- For spinal cord compression: One Cochrane review, six systematic reviews, two RCTs, five other prospective and 17 retrospective studies
- Predicted survival < 6 mths: Short courses of radiotherapy sufficient
- Others: not enough evidence to change practice towards hypofractionation

## And then?

- After a written report is prepared
- And the abstract is submitted and approved by the members of the steering group
- And you have passed the oral presentation at module six
- Put it in a drawer?
- Or try to get it published?