This is a Brief Online Learning Tutorial (or BOLT) brought to you by the LISTEN project, a HRSA funded project focusing on improving the information literacy competencies of nursing students and professional nurses.
As a nurse you often need to look for information using online databases. Should you choose to look for your information in Medline, CINAHL, PsychInfo, EMBASE, or Cochrane? It can be confusing. This tutorial offers tips and gives you some ideas on where to begin your search and which database to use for your search.
Before conducting a literature search using a database, it is important to understand some basics. You need to ask yourself questions such as... What kind of databases collect literature related to nursing? What is the major focus of the database? What kind of information do I need? For example, you may need a clinical guideline, a systematic review article, or a randomized controlled trial article. For additional information about useful databases for nurses see the BOLT titled *Key Databases for Nursing*. 
Each database has a focus. For example, CINAHL focuses on Nursing and Allied health topics and indexes more nursing journals. MEDLINE is the most comprehensive biomedical database and covers almost every area related to medicine, nursing, dentistry etc. PsychINFO has a focus on psychology and the psychological aspects of related disciplines. EMBASE has a strong focus on drug research and pharmaceutical literature and indexes more European journals. Finally, the Cochrane Collection focuses on evidence-based information such as systematic reviews. Note that there might be some overlaps in these databases when searching for your topic of interest.
Different databases have unique features or search filters that can help you to find information resources quickly. Besides knowing the focus and coverage of each database, you need to know some features and filters each database offers.

For example, if you are looking for articles on “positioning to prevent ventilator acquired pneumonia”, the best sources of evidence are systematic reviews of randomized clinical trials. The best database to start with is The Cochrane Library if you have access to the database. The Cochrane library houses up-to-date systematic reviews. Another free database is the PubMed/Medline’ clinical queries.
Once you know there are multiple resources that you can use, it is critical that you are clear about what kind of information you really need. If you are not clear about what you need, it will be like driving without a destination. You will not reach your desired location. You need to define your information into an answerable clinical question, identify major topics, and also identify details related to your question.
You can focus on one database to search for articles, but you don’t have to limit your search to only one database. You can always benefit from searching among the variety of databases related to your topic.
Continue to visit the LISTEN website, at listenuphealth.org, for more helpful tips on using technology and seeking, evaluating, and applying information in nursing to support evidence-based nursing practice.
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