

Additional file 1: Search strategy

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Inclusion criteria

Papers were included if they described or mathematically specified meta-analytic or network meta-analytic methods that combine information from comparative studies that pertain to multiple populations, interventions, outcomes, study-designs or utilise evidence from an external source such as previous meta-analyses.

Exclusion criteria

Papers were excluded from the search if they fell in any of the categories below:

1. Methods or applications developed outside the health research field (e.g. ecology)
2. Applications of standard MA/NMA methods without any extensions or developments to accommodate the inclusion of indirect information
3. Irrelevant papers. Examples in that category include the following
 - Papers that developed graphical/presentational methods for MA/NMA
 - Papers that developed methods intended to assess consistency of the evidence
 - Papers that aimed to introduce basic concepts and methods of MA/NMA, without any focus on advanced methods that extend the standard models to accommodate the inclusion of indirect evidence
 - Reviews of the quality of the methods that are used in MA/NMA
 - Papers that develop methods to combine sources of information outside the field of MA/NMA. For example, methods that aim to utilise evidence from historical controls in the design of future trials or fall outside the field of comparative effectiveness research
4. Protocols for the conduct or analysis of a future study
5. The University of York could not provide access to the full-text article

Table 1: ‘Pearls’ (i.e. seminal papers) used for forwards and backwards citation-mining

#	‘Pearl’	Citations	Cited by
1	Higgins and Whitehead, 1996. <i>Borrowing strength from external trials in a meta-analysis</i>	33	309
2	Ades and Sutton 2006 <i>Multiparameter evidence synthesis in epidemiology and medical decision-making: current approaches</i>	109	82
3	Ades et al., 2006 <i>Bayesian methods for evidence synthesis in cost-effectiveness analysis</i>	79	210
4	Jackson et al., 2011 <i>Multivariate meta-analysis: Potential and promise</i>	74	148
5	Efthimiou et al., 2016 <i>GetReal in network meta-analysis: a review of the methodology</i>	193	37
6	Hobbs et al., 2011 <i>Hierarchical commensurate and power prior models for adaptive incorporation of historical information in clinical trials</i>	16	64
7	Schmidli et al., 2014 <i>Robust meta-analytic-predictive priors in clinical trials with historical control information</i>	50	42