# Levels of Evidence for Primary Research Question

[This chart was adapted from material published by the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine, Oxford, UK. For more information, please see www.cebm.net.]

## Types of Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Therapeutic Studies—Investigating the Results of Treatment</th>
<th>Prognostic Studies—Investigating the Effect of a Patient Characteristic on the Outcome of Disease</th>
<th>Diagnostic Studies—Investigating a Diagnostic Test</th>
<th>Economic and Decision Analyses—Developing an Economic or Decision Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I     | High quality randomized trial with statistically significant difference or no statistically significant difference but narrow confidence intervals  
       | High quality prospective study\(^d\) (all patients were enrolled at the same point in their disease with \(\geq 80\%\) of enrolled patients)  
       | Testing of previously developed diagnostic criteria on consecutive patients (with universally applied reference “gold” standard)  
       | Sensible costs and alternatives; values obtained from many studies; with multiway sensitivity analyses  
       | Systematic review\(^b\) of Level I RCTs  
       | Systematic review\(^b\) of Level I studies  
       | Systematic review\(^b\) of Level I studies  |
| II    | Lesser quality RCT (eg, < 80% followup, no blinding, or improper randomization)  
       | Retrospective\(^f\) study  
       | Development of diagnostic criteria on consecutive patients (with universally applied reference “gold” standard)  
       | Sensible costs and alternatives; values obtained from limited studies; with multiway sensitivity analyses  
       | Prospective\(^e\) comparative study  
       | Systematic review\(^b\) of Level II studies or Level I studies with inconsistent results  
       | Systematic review\(^b\) of Level II studies  
       | Systematic review\(^b\) of Level II studies  |
| III   | Case control study\(^g\)  
       | Case control study\(^g\)  
       | Study of nonconsecutive patients; without consistently applied reference “gold” standard  
       | Analyses based on limited alternatives and costs; and poor estimates  
       | Retrospective\(^f\) comparative study  
       | Systematic review\(^b\) of Level III studies  
       | Systematic review\(^b\) of Level III studies  |
| IV    | Case series\(^b\)  
       | Case series  
       | Case-control study  
       | Analyses with no sensitivity analyses  
       | Expert opinion  
       | Expert opinion  
       | Poor reference standard  
       | Expert opinion  |
| V     | Expert opinion  
       | Expert opinion  
       | Expert opinion  

\(^a\) A complete assessment of quality of individual studies requires critical appraisal of all aspects of the study design.  
\(^b\) A combination of results from two or more prior studies.  
\(^c\) Studies provided consistent results.  
\(^d\) Study was started before the first patient enrolled.  
\(^e\) Patients treated one way (eg, cemented hip arthroplasty) compared with a group of patients treated in another way (eg, uncremented hip arthroplasty) at the same institution.  
\(^f\) The study was started after the first patient enrolled.  
\(^g\) Patients identified for the study based on their outcome, called “cases” eg, failed total arthroplasty, are compared with patients who did not have outcome, called “controls” eg, successful total hip arthroplasty.  
\(^h\) Patients treated one way with no comparison group of patients treated in another way.