
A methodological review of how heterogeneity has been examined in systematic reviews of diagnostic test accuracy

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Authors' objectives

The aim of this study was to review how heterogeneity has been examined in systematic reviews of diagnostic test accuracy studies.

Authors' conclusions

The emphasis on pooling individual aspects of diagnostic test performance and the under-use of statistical tests and graphical approaches to identify heterogeneity perhaps reflect the uncertainty in the most appropriate methods to use and also greater familiarity with more traditional indices of test accuracy. This indicates the difficulty and complexity of carrying out such reviews. In these cases it is strongly suggested that meta-analyses are carried out with the involvement of a statistician familiar with the field. Further methodological work on the statistical methods available for combining diagnostic test accuracy studies is needed, as are sufficiently large, prospectively designed primary studies of diagnostic test accuracy comparing two or more tests for the same target disorder. Use of individual patient data meta-analysis in diagnostic test accuracy reviews should be explored to allow heterogeneity to be considered in more detail.

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