Develop Research to Practice Questions

Two different frameworks are useful in developing research to practice questions: COPES and PICO. These frameworks are highlighted below.

*Use one of the frameworks to guide you as you develop a research to practice question for a client system of yours. Remember to use the most important elements of the three questions (client system, challenges, and context) to help frame the question. Identify what type of question you are asking (effectiveness, prevention, etc.).*

**COPES**

The COPES (Client Oriented Practical Evidence Search) framework derives questions from daily social work practice and is oriented to the client system. COPES questions also have practical significance and are posed specifically enough to elicit a feasible answer in an electronic search for evidence.

Four elements to a well-formulated research to practice question using COPES:

1. Client type and problem (specific statement of the type of client of interest and the problem)
2. What you might do (statement of a possible intervention)
3. Alternate course of action (statement of the main alternative course of action/intervention)
4. What you want to accomplish (goal of the question, i.e., what the practitioner hopes to accomplish or find out from the evidentiary search)

Sometimes it is helpful to phrase an answerable question generally first, then reconstruct into a COPES framework question.

Example of general question:
What evidence-based practices reduce post-partum depression in at-risk teens?
COPES question:
If adolescent African-American mothers are suffering from postpartum depression, will interpersonal therapy or medication best alleviate depression symptoms and improve functioning?

Students may find using the following table helpful to formulate COPES questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Elements in a Well-Formulated Question</th>
<th>Client Type and Problem</th>
<th>What You Might Do</th>
<th>Alternate Course of Action</th>
<th>What You Want to Accomplish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is the client system?</td>
<td>Intervene with specific treatment or type of therapy, implement prevention program, develop policy, assess risk, conduct survey, etc.</td>
<td>What the main alternative to the box is on left (what else you might do)?</td>
<td>Outcome of treatment, policy, change, or program? Accurate measure? Risk factors identified? Behavior modified?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What challenges face the client system?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the intervention context?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Type of question:**

**PICO**
The PICO (Patient, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) format, prompts students to construct an if-then question that asks for the best outcome if two alternative interventions for a problem of a narrowly defined client system are compared.

**PICO Example:**
**P** (patient characteristics/population)  
If an elder residing in a nursing home participates in a pet therapy program or attends an adult day program which intervention will result in lower depression?

**I** (intervention/test being considered)  

**C** (comparison intervention)  

**O** (outcome of clinical interest/measure)