

## ABSTRACT

Title: Working with uncertainty: the role of DUETs in harvesting what we don't know

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### Background

The *Database of Uncertainties about the Effects of Treatments* (DUETs) has been established in the UK to publish uncertainties about health care treatments that cannot currently be answered by referring to reliable up-to-date systematic reviews of existing research evidence. DUETs draws on three main sources to identify uncertainties about the effects of treatments:

- patients', carers' and clinicians' questions about the effects of treatments
- research recommendations in reports of systematic reviews and clinical guidelines
- ongoing research, both systematic reviews in preparation and new 'primary' studies

DUETs is being developed to help those prioritising research in the UK to take account of information needs important to patients, carers and clinicians. Other health research programmes, such as the ThinkWell programme (The International Network for Knowledge on Well-Being), are interested in using the DUETs harvesting methodology to provide a robust, systematic mechanism on which to base the identification, and prioritization, of questions focusing on public-led research, and the issues surrounding internet-based pragmatic clinical trials.

### Methods

The DUETs harvesting methodology was analysed and adapted for the ThinkWell programme. Sources for uncertainties were identified, including meeting reports, research recommendations, research proposals, and weblogs. Harvested questions are processed using question formulation techniques, keyword identification and comprehensive searching. Known uncertainties are then categorized, using a pre-determined protocol, into a list of potential primary or secondary research questions. These are then made available for prioritization by the ThinkWell programme.

### Results

For the ThinkWell programme, 2 meeting reports, 5 research proposals, and 5 sets of research recommendations were screened for unanswered questions. These questions will be processed, and a list of known uncertainties produced

### Discussions

The development of the DUETs database has produced an important resource for researchers and research funders. The use of a systematic methodology for identifying known uncertainties will help the ThinkWell programme to prioritise important topics for either primary research or systematic review in a complex area that spans many disciplines and knowledge bases. The process as used in DUETs and ThinkWell has also raised important issues for information professionals, including their role in handling uncertainty, both for their users, and in their own practice. These issues will be discussed, and recommendations made concerning how these methods might be further applied to evidence-based information practice.