Frameworks for Research to Practice Questions

**COPES Framework**

Leonard Gibbs (2003) recommends the following framework for posing research to practice questions for social workers: *Client Oriented Practical Evidence Search (COPES)*. COPES questions are:

- Derived from daily social work practice
- Oriented to the client system
- Have practical significance
- Posed specifically enough to elicit a feasible answer in an electronic search for evidence

**Four elements to a well-formulated research to practice question:**

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 or 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)

*Here is an example of an effectiveness question:

**General question:** Is cognitive behavioral problem solving therapy or parent counseling training more effective for treating oppositional defiant disorder?

**Well-built COPES question:** For school-aged children with oppositional defiant disorder, will a cognitive behavioral problem solving intervention or parent counseling training result in a greater decrease in incidents of verbal and physical aggression?

**Additional Information**

For a more detailed discussion of COPES questions and examples of each type, refer to Gibbs’ Web site at: [http://www.evidence.brookscole.com/moredetails.html](http://www.evidence.brookscole.com/moredetails.html).

**PICO Framework**

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:
FINDING RESEARCH EVIDENCE
STUDENT HANDOUT 2

**P** (patient characteristics/population)  
If an elder residing in a nursing home

**I** (intervention/test being considered)  
participates in a pet therapy program

**C** (comparison intervention)  
or attends an adult day program

**O** (outcome of clinical interest/measure)  
which intervention will result in lower depression?

**Answerable Question**

McNeese and Thyer (2004) suggest that answerable questions consist of a question with a verb that includes some aspect of the client system’s problem or condition.

Examples:

What group therapies improve the interpersonal dynamics with families of adolescents with substance abuse problems?

What community-based interventions reduce elder abuse in private homes?

How can nursing homes decrease the use of restraints among violent psychiatric patients?