Connecting a Research Question to an Appropriate Study Design

Question Types

Therapy	Is this intervention more effective than another
Diagnostic Test	How accurate is this diagnostic test
Prognosis	What is the likely outcome, progression or survival time for this condition
Harm/Etiology	What are the causes of this condition or state of affairs
Prevention	How to reduce the risk of this disease
Cost-Effectiveness	Is intervention X more cost-effective than intervention Y
Quality of Life	What will be the quality of life for the patient following this intervention, with this condition, etc.

Type of Study for Question*

Therapy	RCT (randomized control trial)
Diagnostic Test	Independent, blind comparison to a gold standard
Prognosis	Cohort study > case control > case series
Harm/Etiology	RCT > cohort study > case control > case series
Prevention	RCT > cohort study > case control
Cost-Effectiveness	Economic analysis
Quality of Life	Qualitative study

* In each case, a systematic review of all the available studies is better than an individual study. A systematic review will compare several appropriately designed studies that have looked at the same question and aggregate the results.