Reviews of the literature play an important role in the advancement of nursing and biomedical science by combining the results of systematically chosen studies to come to conclusions about a body of research. The research literature on most topics pertinent to the care of women, infants, and their families is broad and interdisciplinary in origin and focus. The evolution of evidence-based practice has led to the proliferation of all types of literature reviews including those that are described as integrative reviews, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and qualitative reviews (Whittemore & Knaff, 2005). As the science of the systematic review has evolved, so have expectations for a publishable review of the literature.

The general goal of systematic or meta-analytic reviews is to identify all studies relevant to a specific topic or question, evaluate the findings of the relevant studies, and summarize these findings to make the evidence more accessible to researchers, clinicians, and health care consumers (Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, 2009). The systematic review is the method of choice for evidence-based practice projects such as the Cochrane Collaboration. These reviews usually are focused on identifying the most precise and reliable estimate of an intervention’s effectiveness from findings of multiple studies because any single study may over- or underestimate the effect. A meta-analysis is most commonly used to synthesize results from randomized clinical trials, although the method also has been applied to the synthesis of results from epidemiologic or observational research (Stroup et al., 2000). In contrast, systematic or integrative literature reviews may have a wide range of purposes (definition of concepts, review of theories, analysis of methods, and review of evidence) and use broader approaches that may include experimental and nonexperimental studies and information from theoretical as well as empirical literature. Methods also have been described for reviews of primary qualitative studies such as meta-synthesis, meta-studies, formal grounded theory, and meta-ethnography (Whittemore & Knaff, 2005).

Below are general guidelines for the preparation of a systematic literature review manuscript for potential publication in JOGNN. These guidelines have been adapted from Systematic Reviews, the document recently published by the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination at the University of York (2009). Importantly, these guidelines provide advice for how to conduct a review and guidance for the preparation of the report of the review. The entire document is available without charge at http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/systematic_reviews_book.htm.

1. **Introduction and background for the review.** Identify the key contextual factors and conceptual issues important to the review question. Justify the need for the review. Critically appraise any existing reviews.

2. **Review questions and/or objectives.** Clearly and precisely state the question or questions that the review will answer. Identify the following elements included in the review as appropriate to the question:
   - a. Population
   - b. Intervention(s)
   - c. Comparators to the intervention
   - d. Outcomes: primary and/or secondary
   - e. Study designs

3. **Review methods**
   - a. Specify how studies were identified by describing:
     - Who conducted the searches
     - Databases searched (were hand-searches conducted and if so, how?)
     - Inclusive years of the search
     - Keywords and combinations used
   - b. Define specific inclusion and exclusion criteria used to select studies
   - c. Describe data extraction
   - d. Describe strategy for the assessment of the quality of each study. See Olivo et al. (2008) for a review of scales to assess the quality of randomized controlled trials.
   - e. Describe method(s) of data synthesis
4. Review results
   a. Provide details of the how studies were excluded and the numbers excluded at each stage (a figure can be used to illustrate these steps)
   b. Review details of the included studies (a succinct table can be used to summarize major characteristics of the included studies)
   c. Findings of the review (tables can be used to summarize extracted data as appropriate)

5. Discussion
   a. State principal findings of the review
   b. Strengths and weaknesses of the review method
   c. Strengths and weaknesses of the evidence from the review
   d. Applicability of the findings
   e. Implications of the findings for practice, education, and/or policy
   f. Questions unanswered by the review with implications for research

It is important that authors submitting review articles for potential publication in JOGNN be familiar with and closely follow these guidelines.

REFERENCES