Developing the right question is fundamental to the evidence-based decision-making process. A well-built clinical question should include four parts:

(P) patient problem or population
(I) intervention
(C) comparison and
(O) outcome or outcomes

When identifying the **P** in PICO it is important to determine:

- **P**rimary problem
- **P**atient's main concern or chief complaint
- Disease or health status
- Age, Race, Sex, previous ailments, current medications

Identifying the **I**ntervention is the second step in the PICO process. **I**dentify what you plan to do for that patient.

This may include the use of a specific diagnostic test, treatment or therapy, or medication.

Comparison is the third phase of the well-built question, which is the main alternative you are considering.

It should be specific and limited to one alternative choice in order to facilitate an effective search strategy.

Remember that an alternative may be to do nothing.

The **O**utcome is the final aspect of the PICO question. It specifies the result(s) of what you plan to accomplish, improve or affect. **O**utcomes should be measurable, and may consist of:

- relieving or eliminating specific symptoms
- improving or maintaining function
- enhancing esthetics

Specific **O**utcome**s** will yield better search results by facilitating the discovery of studies that focus on specific outcomes. When defining the outcome, "more effective" is not acceptable unless it *describes how* the intervention is more effective.

In addition to identifying the PICO components, it is important to clarify the type of question you are asking and the related research method. The typical categories for types of questions are: therapy/prevention, diagnosis, etiology, and prognosis.

Once you have identified a patient problem and defined your question using PICO, you are ready to find the most current, valid evidence!