

When the Search for Evidence Is Fruitless, What Do We Do?

Flossing

In 2016, a major study reviewed existing research on the effectiveness of flossing and found the evidence to be weak and unreliable. There is no evidence for the effectiveness of flossing. Due to this finding, flossing is no longer listed in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. However, many dentists continue to recommend flossing daily.

Antibacterial Soap

In 2013, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required data on the effectiveness and safety of antibacterial soap. Between 2013 and 2016, very little information was provided. There is no evidence for the effectiveness of antibacterial soap. In 2016, the FDA issued a rule banning the marketing of certain antibacterial products.



Child Welfare

Is child welfare practice evidence more similar to the flossing or antibacterial soap example? The evidence base for child welfare is slim and conflicting. How should agencies and society react to the lack evidence?



Three Questions for Consideration

- Evidence is difficult to come up with for many reasons (timeframes, confounding, etc.). If we cannot find evidence, how do we move forward without it?
- If there is no evidence of a positive effect, is evidence of lack of harm sufficient?
- Are normative standards just as important as empirical standards? Is this a policy and ethics issue more than an effectiveness issue?