

University of York Department of Health Sciences
M.Sc. in Evidence Based Practice, M.Sc. in Health Services Research

Suggested answers: Combining data from many studies

- (a) *What kind of study is this?* This is a systematic review.
- (b) *Why does the author think that statistical meta-analysis would be inappropriate? Do you agree?* The studies are evaluating several different methods of acupuncture, for different lengths of time. The treatments are related, but not the same. Also, the outcome measures vary a lot from study to study. It seems implausible that there would be a common treatment difference to estimate, so I agree with the author.
- (c) *What problems are caused by the results being reported in terms of significance tests?* When differences are not significant, we do not know whether this is because there was no difference or the sample was not large enough to detect a difference that was present. The author tends to interpret 'not significant' as 'no difference'
- (d) *What are the author's conclusions concerning acupuncture and are they justified by the data?* She concludes that acupuncture benefits many women and is worth trying, as it appears not to have adverse effects. This seems a reasonable conclusion from the evidence.