Abstract

Most of the techniques in meta-analysis were derived from a desire to summarize published information. The questions one can address using published information are somewhat limited since they rely on finding uniformly published results from many studies and finding such information is often impossible for all but very simple analyses. For this reason, much of the biostatistical literature dealing with meta-analysis deals with the results of clinical trials that summarize a single measure of results. In observational studies the questions one would like to address are often more complex. In this talk we discuss the meta-analysis of one such question: How do we best describe the relationship between Body Mass Index (BMI = wt(kg)/ht(m)^2) and mortality.

There is large variability in the results reported for describing the relationship of BMI to mortality. Studies have reported no association, a U-shaped association, a J-shaped association, a direct association, and even an inverse association. There are even examples of different analyses from the same study reporting different association.

In this talk, we explore two possible sources for the variability in these results: inherent differences in the studies (“study level covariates”) or different due to different analytic techniques.

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