

Background & Significance

- Billions of pathology tests are conducted annually in the United States
- The tests are used to diagnose cancer, diabetes, and other acute and chronic conditions
- In many instances, such as cancer, the pathologists provide disease prognosis as well
- Despite their importance, pathology reports are written in difficult language beyond the comprehension of most patients
- Studies have shown that when patients are included in decision-making they have better outcomes, but patients are unable to be involved in the process when this vital component is missing

Research Question

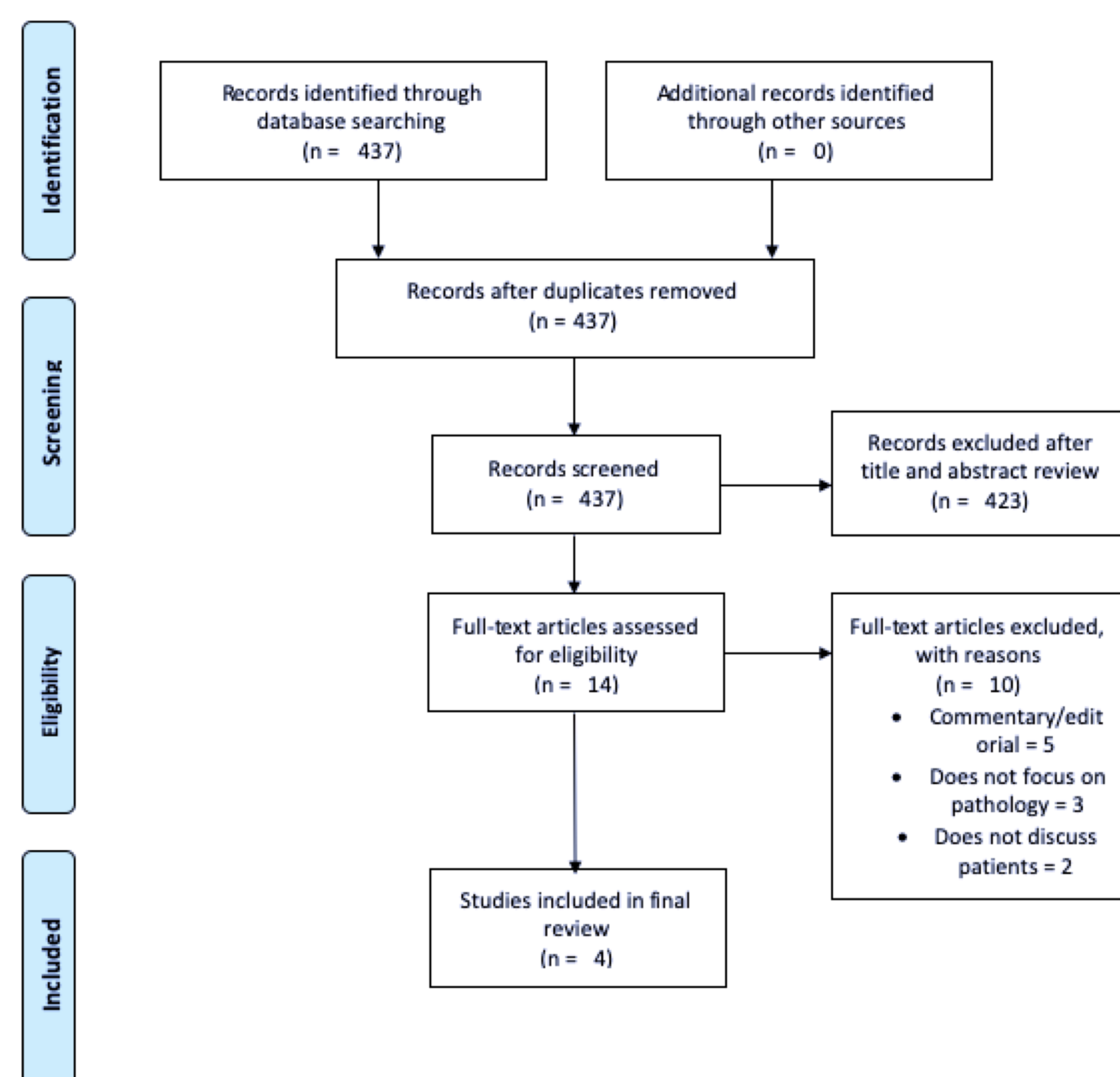
Are there recommendations, guidelines, or studies that focus on improving pathology reports or providing educational material that could be understood by patients?

Methods

Conduct a rapid systematic review of the literature to identify articles that address patient-centered pathology reports following Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines.

In consultation with an expert research librarian, the PubMed was explored using the following search terms and derivatives:

Pathology reports, diagnosis, biopsy, surgery, patient-centered care, patient navigation, layman terms, laymen language, physician-patient relations, electronic medical records, decision making, patient generated health data



Results

4 articles were included in the final analysis. The underlying themes are outlined below

Better understanding of the pathology report

- Patients stated that standard reports contained no explanation of the results, and leave the patient with uncertainty as to what it means and what the next steps should be
- Patients generally viewed patient-centered pathology report (PCPR) more favorably than a standard report
- The language in the PCPR/family report was easier to understand than standard medical jargon

Identification of disease state

- Patients who received the PCPR had improved ability to identify and recall important elements of their report, such as cancer stage or Gleason score

Future improvements

- The experience of receiving a pathology report is variable and confusing
- The ideal report would contain roadmap or information about what to expect in the future and the recommended next steps after the diagnosis
- Information that is pertinent to decision making should be highlighted and prioritized in the report

Communication

- Difficulty understanding the information can impact the patient's ability to communicate effectively with providers about their care
- Parents believed that a family report could help facilitate better communication with both physicians and other family members
- Among patients who received a PCPR there was some association with better provider communication

Discussion

- Despite a rigorous search of the literature, only 1% of articles from the initial search were eligible for inclusion in final analysis
- A systematic review conducted in 2014 assessing the target audience of pathology reports noted that not a single one of the articles discussed patients as their target audience
- It is disheartening to see that despite its importance, very little progress has been made since
- Pathology is vital for obtaining diagnostic and prognostic information about the patient
- Numerous studies have linked patient involvement with better outcomes, but patients cannot be part of the decision-making process if the report is beyond their comprehension
- This problem is not unique to pathology, but pathology has lagged behind
- The field of radiology made an effort to create a framework for patient-centered reports that laypeople could easily understand
- Although the discipline of pathology is unique in the sense that it is largely devoid of patient interaction, pathologists must recognize that they serve both patients and physicians and accommodate patients' needs

Next Steps

- Development of qualitative and quantitative measures to increase patients' readability and comprehension of pathology reports
- Devoting resources to develop tools and frameworks for writing patient-centered reports

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