

## Introduction

Many modern concepts within clinical bioethics can be conceptualized in various ways. This subjectivity is demonstrated when analyzing ideas in the literature about the types of evidence that can or should be used by surrogate decision-makers to determine an incapacitated patient's wishes. Authors have different ideas about sourcing, quality and timing of information that may provide evidence about an incapacitated patient's wishes. This project aims to explore the various understandings of this concept and to map the current ethical landscape through a systematic review.

## Aims and Objectives

- Explore the literature for opinions regarding where and how evidence should be sourced by surrogate decision-makers to determine a patient's wishes.
- Map the current landscape of this concept to provide a platform for further research and recommendations.

## Methods

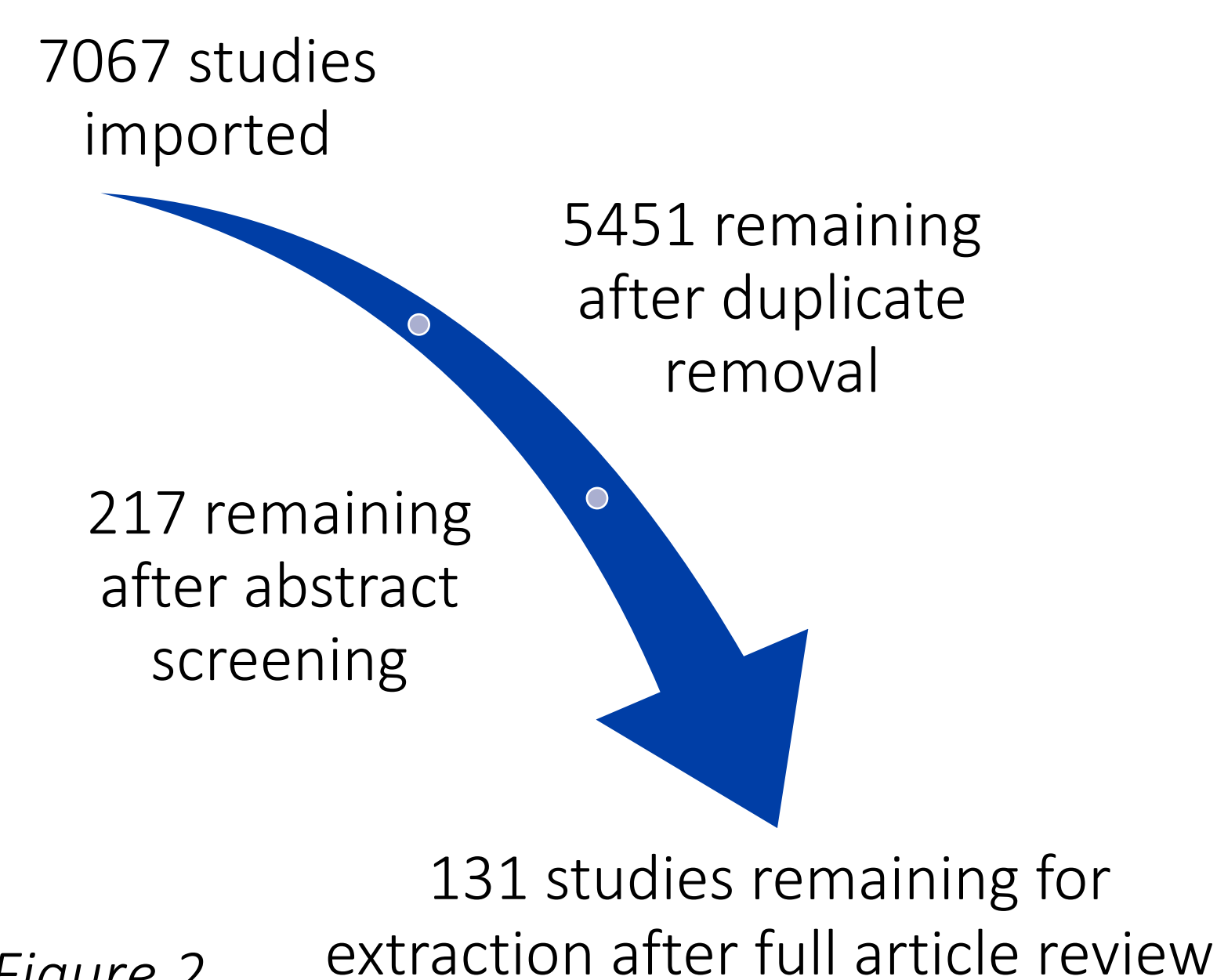
- Covidence, a web-based software program, was the main tool used to carry out the systematic review.
- Search terms were generated to yield articles that would be imported into Covidence and considered for the final review. Duplicate articles were removed.
- Articles were first screened based on title and abstract, and then through a full article review. Inclusion and exclusion criteria (Figure 1.) were used to decide if articles were to be included.
- Finally, normative statements involving the topic of interest were extracted.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1a. Uses the term "surrogate," "proxy," "agent," "power of attorney, (DPOA)" or "guardian" in the title or abstract.	1a. Does not use term "surrogate," "proxy," "agent," "power of attorney, (DPOA)" or "guardian" in the title or abstract.
1b. Focuses on patients	1b. Not focused on patients
1c. Focused to some substantial degree on clinical care	1c. Not focused in any substantial way on clinical care
2. Significantly engaged with normative claims in the full text	2. Not significantly engaged with normative claims in the full text
3. Significantly focuses on surrogacy	3. Not significantly focused on surrogacy

Figure 1.

## Results

- The systematic review yielded 131 final articles for extraction of information relevant to the aims and objectives (Figure 2.).



There are many varying opinions about sources used to determine an incapacitated patient's wishes outside of more concrete sources such as stated wishes and advance directives. With the use of social media websites becoming more popular, many share the opinion that information from these sites can be relied upon in medical decision making.<sup>1,2, 8</sup> Some caution that these sources must be evaluated carefully. As an example, people can have different personas on the internet and may not display their actual interests.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, qualities such as specificity, thoughtfulness and consistency of the evidence should be considered in determining if the information is valid.<sup>1,8,9</sup> Some argue that social media, especially video content, can be superior to written directives as it can better convey emotional tone.<sup>1</sup> Many authors believe that cultural and religious beliefs can also provide evidence of wishes.<sup>3,5,6,9</sup> There must be careful consideration as beliefs vary amongst the group and should not be generalized to individuals.<sup>4,5</sup> Finally, many articles explore the timing of evidence. Some researchers believe it is likely that a patient's stated or documented wishes may be irrelevant at the time they are evaluated as it is likely that they evolve over time.<sup>2,7</sup>

## Conclusions

- Many sources including stated wishes, advance directives, social media, cultural and religious beliefs may be considered by surrogate decision-makers to determine a patient's wishes.
- In the literature, there are a myriad of opinions regarding the source, quality and timing of evidence that determines its validity.
- Further exploration into this complex topic is required to provide recommendations that can ultimately lead to improved accuracy in determining an incapacitated patient's wishes.

## References

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