

Acknowledgments, ix

Foreword, xi

Preface, xiii

Part I: Introduction

- 1** The philosophy of evidence-based medicine, 3
 - 1.1 What on earth was medicine based on before evidence-based medicine?, 3
 - 1.2 Scope of the book, 7
 - 1.3 How the claims of EBM will be examined, 8
 - 1.4 Structure of what is to come, 8

- 2** What is EBM?, 10
 - 2.1 EBM as a self-proclaimed Kuhnian paradigm, 10
 - 2.2 The motivation for the birth of EBM: a sketch, 11
 - 2.3 Original definition of EBM, 15
 - 2.4 Reaction to criticism of the EBM system of evidence: more subtle, more or less the same, 20

- 3** What is good evidence for a clinical decision?, 24
 - 3.1 Introduction, 24
 - 3.2 Evidence *for* clinical effectiveness, 25
 - 3.3 Strong evidence tells us what?, 29

Part II: Do randomization, double masking, and placebo controls rule out more confounding factors than their alternatives?

- 4** Ruling out plausible rival hypotheses and confounding factors: a method, 33

- 5** Resolving the paradox of effectiveness: when do observational studies offer the same degree of evidential support as randomized trials?, 39
 - 5.1 The paradox of effectiveness, 39
 - 5.2 Observational studies: definition and problems, 40
 - 5.3 Randomized trials to the rescue, 43
 - 5.4 Defending the EBM view that randomized trials provide better evidence than observational studies, 48
 - 5.5 Overcoming the paradox of effectiveness, 56
 - 5.6 Conclusion: a more subtle way to distinguish between high- and low-quality comparative clinical studies, 59
- Appendix 1: types of restricted randomization, 60
- Appendix 2: Worrall's arguments that randomization is required for classical hypothesis testing and establishing probabilistic causes, 61
- 6** Questioning double blinding as a universal methodological virtue of clinical trials: resolving the Philip's paradox, 63
 - 6.1 The problems with double masking as a requirement for clinical trial validity, 63
 - 6.2 The many faces of double masking: clarifying the terminology, 65
 - 6.3 Confounders that arise from participant and caregiver knowledge, 66
 - 6.4 The importance of *successful* double masking, 69
 - 6.5 One (and a half) solutions to the Philip's paradox, 75
 - 6.6 The full solution to the Philip's paradox: challenging the view that double masking rules out confounding factors when treatments are evidently dramatic, 76
 - 6.7 Double masking is valuable unless the treatment effects are evidently dramatic, hence the Philip's paradox does not arise, 78
- 7** Placebo controls: problematic and misleading baseline measures of effectiveness, 80
 - 7.1 The need to control the placebo, 80
 - 7.2 Legitimate placebo controls, 82
 - 7.3 How placebo controls often violate the first condition for legitimacy, 83
 - 7.4 How placebo controls often violate the second condition for legitimacy, 86
 - 7.5 Special problem for constructing placebos for complex treatments: case studies of exercise and acupuncture, 87
 - 7.6 Summary and solution to the problem with illegitimate placebo controls, 94

- 8** Questioning the methodological superiority of “placebo” over “active” controlled trials, 96
 - 8.1 Epistemological foundations of the ethical debate over the use of placebo-controlled trials, 96
 - 8.2 Problems with the assay sensitivity arguments against ACTs, 98
 - 8.3 Problems with the first assay sensitivity argument against ACTs, 98
 - 8.4 The second assay sensitivity argument, 106
 - 8.5 Challenging the view that PCTs provide a measure of absolute effect size, 107
 - 8.6 Questioning the claim that PCTs require smaller sample sizes, 112
 - 8.7 Conclusion: a reassessment of the relative methodological quality of PCTs, 113
- Appendix: more detailed explanation of why the second assay sensitivity argument fails, 114

Part III: Examining the paradox that traditional roles for mechanistic reasoning and expert judgment have been up-ended by EBM

- 9** Transition to Part III, 119
 - 9.1 Summary of Part II, 119
 - 9.2 Introduction to Part III, 120
- 10** A qualified defence of the EBM stance on mechanistic reasoning, 122
 - 10.1 A tension between proponents of mechanistic reasoning and EBM views, 122
 - 10.2 Clarifying the terminology: comparative clinical studies, mechanisms, and mechanistic reasoning, 124
 - 10.3 Why the strong view that mechanistic reasoning is necessary to establish causal claims is mistaken, 130
 - 10.4 Two epistemological problems with mechanistic reasoning, 136
 - 10.5 Why EBM proponents should allow a more prominent role for high-quality (valid and based on “complete” mechanisms) mechanistic reasoning in their evidence hierarchies, 143
 - 10.6 Mechanisms and other roles in clinical medicine, 146
 - 10.7 Recommending a (slightly) more important role for mechanistic reasoning in the EBM system, 153

viii Contents

Appendix: cases where mechanistic reasoning led to the adoption of therapies that were either useless or harmful according to well-conducted clinical research, 154

- 11 Knowledge *that* versus knowledge *how*: situating the EBM position on expert clinical judgment, 158
 - 11.1 Controversies surrounding the EBM stance on expert clinical judgement, 158
 - 11.2 General clinical judgment belongs at the bottom of (or off) the hierarchy of evidence, 161
 - 11.3 Individual clinical judgment also belongs at the bottom of the hierarchy, 167
 - 11.4 The equally important non-evidential roles of expertise, 176
 - 11.5 Conclusion, 182

Part IV: Conclusions

- 12 Moving EBM forward, 187
 - 12.1 Summary of findings: the EBM philosophy is acceptable, but. . ., 187
 - 12.2 Two new frontiers for EBM, 189

References, 193

Index, 225