Results can be summarised in a simple figure

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Studies based on network meta-analysis are increasingly being published,¹ but little attention has been paid to how the information generated is best summarised graphically. Most authors favour multiple Forest plots, with some advocating the use of increasingly complex graphical methods.²

Non-specialist readers need a figure that limits the information presented to the results of individual comparisons in terms of significance. A few examples of such figures have been published,³ ⁴ and an open source program to draw them is freely available.⁵

These simplified figures represent each direct comparison by a solid line and each indirect comparison by a dotted line, with the statistical results for each comparison given as relative risk (or odds ratio) and 95% confidence interval. Symbols such as + and – can be added to show the treatment favoured by the clinical result (figure⁶).⁴
Comparison of stroke prevention treatments in non-rheumatic atrial fibrillation. RCT=randomised controlled trial

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- Competing interests: None declared.

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