5. Setting: Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including periods of recruitment, exposure, follow up, and data collection.

Example

‘‘The Pasitos Cohort Study recruited pregnant women from Women, Infant and Child clinics in Socorro and San Elizario, El Paso County, Texas and maternal-child clinics of the Mexican Social Security Institute in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico from April 1998 to October 2000. At baseline, prior to the birth of the enrolled cohort children, staff interviewed mothers regarding the household environment. In this ongoing cohort study, we target follow-up exams at 6-month intervals beginning at age 6 months’’

Explanation

Readers need information on setting and locations to assess the context and generalisability of a study’s results. Exposures such as environmental factors and therapies can change over time. Also, study methods may evolve over time. Knowing when a study took place and over what period participants were recruited and followed up places the study in historical context and is important for the interpretation of results. Information about setting includes recruitment sites or sources (e.g., electoral roll, outpatient clinic, cancer registry, or tertiary care centre). Information about location may refer to the countries, towns, hospitals or practices where the investigation took place. We advise stating dates rather than only describing the length of time periods. There may be different sets of dates for exposure, disease occurrence, recruitment, beginning and end of follow-up, and data collection. Of note, nearly 80% of 132 reports in oncology journals that used survival analysis included the starting and ending dates for accrual of patients, but only 24% also reported the date on which follow-up ended.