How does a network meta-analysis work?

1. Traditional Cochrane reviews generally compare one treatment against another.

   ![Diagram of A and B treatments]

   This is helpful when there are only two important treatment options — but less helpful when nephrologists and patients need to trade-off the benefits and harms of several competing options at once.

2. Network reviews can compare all competing treatments for a given medical condition by using treatment estimates of several drugs within a single analysis.

   ![Diagram of A, B, C, and D treatments]

   Treatments can be compared even when head-to-head trials are not available, as long as treatments are compared with one other drug within the network.

3. For example, in this review, all erythropoiesis-stimulating agents (ESAs) can be compared to placebo even when many placebo-trials are not available (for example, for biosimilar ESAs). *Dashed line indicates no direct trials were available to compare drug effects.

   ![Diagram of A, B, C, D, E treatments]