Records identified through database searching (MEDLINE, EMBASE, The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, BIOSIS, Web of Science) (n = 4809)

Records after duplicates removed (n = 4310)

Titles and abstracts screened (n = 4310)  
Records excluded (n = 4237)

Additional records identified from the grey literature (n = 6)

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 79)  
Full-text articles excluded (n = 73)

- not NCP population n = 1
- not on Hb levels n = 37
- not comparative study n = 24
- review, editorial or comment n = 5
- abstract only* n = 1
- unavailable data* n = 2
- ongoing studies n = 1
- same patients n = 1
- outcome not reported by randomization groups n=1

*data could not be obtained from corresponding authors

Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n = 6)