

Module 6: Clinical Practice Guidelines

In your search for good systematic reviews and clinical trials on a topic you will no doubt come across clinical practical guidelines. One cannot scan a journal anymore without finding information on a new published practice guideline. As we have seen with systematic reviews, the production and availability of clinical practice guidelines continue to rise each year...according to PubMed over 1000 practice guidelines were published in 2009 alone.

Clinical practice guidelines are systematically developed statements to help provide consistent health care and establish practice standards. They are generally developed at the regional, national, or international levels by health associations, professional societies or governmental agencies, such as the *Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (or AHRQ)*; however, local healthcare providers often produce their own set of guidelines or adapt them from existing top-level guidelines.

Be aware, though, that practice guidelines tend to be either consensus-based or evidence-based. Consensus-based guidelines generally rely on the expertise of experts to support the development of a guideline, whereas evidence-based guidelines utilize the research or evidence for developing recommendations.

The primary attraction of guidelines for practitioners is that like systematic reviews the best of them provide a concise summary of current best evidence on an intervention and, therefore, can strengthen your conclusion.

Although there are several sources for clinical guidelines, this module will only discuss three of the best resources (and each are free to all):

- National Guidelines Clearinghouse
- TRIP
- PubMed

Initiated and maintained by the AHRQ of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Guideline Clearinghouse or NGC [SLIDE] is a free Internet database with a mission to provide objective, detailed summaries of 2,400 selected evidence-based guidelines. In order for a guideline to be included in this database, it must have been created using the existing scientific evidence from peer reviewed journals and it must be current ; that is, developed, reviewed, or revised within the last five years.

One of the best features of the NGC is the detailed search form [SLIDE] which allows you to filter out your results and retrieve only the guidelines that include a weighting scheme that assesses the quality and strength of the evidence from which it was developed.

It should also be mentioned that although the NGC only includes a detailed summary of a guideline, it does provide a link or an address to access the guideline in its entirety.

[SLIDE] Another good website to identify guidelines is the TRIP Database. Results from a search in TRIP can be limited to Practice Guidelines [SLIDE]. Trip really acts as a complement the NGC, since the NGC is North America based (though it does include guidelines from foreign sources). TRIP, however, is based in Great Britain and uses many for foreign sources to identify guidelines. [SLIDE] Here are the sources TRIP mines in Aus/New Zealand [SLIDE]; Canada [SLIDE]; the UK [SLIDE] and other countries [SLIDE] such as Brazil, Philippines, South Africa, etc.

A final place to uncover Practice Guidelines is, of course, PubMed. [SLIDE]. Since many, many of the guidelines are published in the journal literature (over 15,000); PubMed will include them in the results of any topic search. To limit your search to practice guidelines, simply conduct your topic search, then click on the limits tab, which will get you to this page. Select Practice Guideline and click on Search.

OK...practice guidelines can be useful to support other forms of evidence you have gathered. Keep in mind, however, that guidelines are often consensus based and therefore making it necessary for you to evaluate each by considering the following questions [SLIDE]:

1. How was the guideline developed...consensus or based on the research?
2. Are the recommendations of the guideline valid and reliable?
3. Can the recommendations be generalized and applied to a population?
4. Was the guideline developed with using a peer review process?
5. Was a search of the recent relevant literature conducted and explained?
6. Was the guideline recently created, reviewed, or updated?

[SLIDE] You have completed Module 5.