



HEALTH

***Strengthening links between guideline
developers and systematic
reviews: experience from the American
College of Physicians***

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American College of Physicians Practice Guidelines

- **ACP is the largest specialty physician organization in America**
- **ACP has been developing clinical practice guidelines for more than 20 years**
- **ACP guidelines are generally given high marks for rigor of development**
- **ACP produces 2-4 guidelines each year, there are 14 active guidelines (Summer 2013)**
- **Stated policy is review or withdrawal at 5 years**

ACP Guideline Process

- **Topics are developed from within the Clinical Guidelines Committee or from ACP membership surveys**
- **Evidence review topics are nominated to the AHRQ Evidence Based Practice Center for consideration**
- **Topics selected by AHRQ go on to get state-of-the-art systematic reviews performed by EPC's**
- **Members of the Clinical Guidelines Committee work with the EPC during the systematic review process**
- **After the review is completed, the committee develops the guideline**
- **There is a very small budget to support the Guidelines Committee**

The links between guideline developers and systematic reviews

How it is supposed to work

- The EPC contacts the Guideline Committee shortly after award of the contract**
- 1 or 2 Guideline Committee Members serve as part of a 7-9 person Technical Expert Panel**
- The Technical Experts provide input on refining key questions and the scope of the review**
- The Technical Experts, and later the Guidelines Committee, peer review the draft evidence review**

How it is supported to work (continued)

- The Guideline Committee has a teleconference with the Authors of the review, where the draft report is presented, and the Committee gets to ask questions and seek clarification**
- The Committee drafts guideline statements**
- The systematic review team drafts a summary article for publication with guidelines in Annals of Internal Medicine**
- The guidelines and the systematic review go through journal peer review process and are published in the same issue**
- There is coordination of three publications: The guideline, the systematic review in the journal, and the AHRQ evidence report.**

ACP's Partnership with the AHRQ EPC Program

What has gone right

- There has been a great improvement in the quality of the systematic reviews supporting ACP guidelines**
- This in turn helps strengthen the quality of ACP guidelines**
- ACP and several EPCs have developed mutually rewarding collaborative working relationships**
- The flow of new systematic reviews has allowed expansion of the ACP guidelines portfolio**

ACP's Partnership with the AHRQ EPC Program

What has gone wrong

- The 1-2 Guideline Committee Members on the Technical Expert Panel get out-voted in terms of scope and focus of the systematic review, the final product does not fully address all the key questions of the Guideline Committee**
- The systematic review goes far beyond timeline, delaying everything else**
- Some conclusions or SOE in the draft report seem wrong based on the evidence presented**
- The systematic reviewers are reluctant to make revisions based on Committee input, since their budget has run out, and they view AHRQ and the Journal as their primary stakeholders, not the Guidelines Committee**

What has gone wrong (continued)

- The systematic review has a major change in conclusions after Annals peer review, necessitating changes in the guidelines
- In order to speed up the time between the end date of the search for the systematic review and its publication date, the Journal publishes the systematic review ahead of the guideline
 - In the intervening period, everyone prays no new evidence is published

How can these be avoided?

- **Communication**
- **Viewing the Guidelines Committee as an important stakeholder**
- **Concurrent peer review of the evidence report by the Journal and the Guidelines Committee**
- **Speeding up the Guidelines Committee process**
(All guidelines need to be approved at an in-person meeting of the ACP Board of Governors)