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Health care professionals' job characteristics and attitudes towards clinical guidelines

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Background: Many challenges are faced when introducing clinical guidelines into routine daily practice. These may include characteristics of guidelines and/or individual practitioner's social context of care provision or environment. Previous studies have shown that job characteristics and organisational context influence the opportunities to follow the guidelines as well as the attitudes towards them.

Purpose: The aim of the study was to describe and compare physicians' and nurses' job characteristics and attitudes towards clinical guidelines. We also examined the mediating and moderating effects of job characteristics on the relationship between profession and attitudes.

Method: The data (n=687) were collected by an electronic survey between November 2006 and May 2007 in two hospital districts and one rural primary care centre in Finland. Attitudes towards guidelines were assessed by the Attitudes towards guidelines scale (Elovainio & al.1999) and job characteristics with the Job Demand–Control model by Karasek (1979). The professionals' experiences on lack of social support and problems with information technology were examined.

Results: In general, the professionals' attitudes towards clinical guidelines were positive. Job strain, lack of social support, and problems with information technology were associated with negative attitudes toward guidelines. However, there were differences between professions. Nurses with low decision latitude and heavy job demands considered attitudes in the organisation more negative than physicians with heavy job strain. In addition, nurses having more often problems with information technology reported lacking individual and/or team abilities to use guidelines.

Discussion: Health care organisations may need to consider the impact of job characteristics and work community on staffs' attitudes toward clinical practice guidelines. Attention should be paid especially to those who consider their work stressful.