

# Conducting and Managing Peer Review of Clinical Practice Guidelines

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# Background

## **Advantages of external review of a guideline**

- (1) Checking the accuracy, comprehensiveness, and balance of the scientific evidence
- (2) Checking the validity of the rationale for recommendations
- (3) Feedback on the clarity and feasibility of recommendations
- (4) Engagement of stakeholders

Paul Shekelle, Steven Woolf, Jeremy M Grimshaw, Holger J Schünemann, and Martin P Eccles. *Implementation Science* 2012;**7**:62 doi:10.1186/1748-5908-7-62

# GRADE Guideline Checklist

- **15.6.** Initiate organizational (i.e. internal) peer review.
- **15.7.** Decide on the method(s) of external peer review, to review the final document(s) for accuracy, practicality, clarity, organization, and usefulness of the recommendations, as well as to ensure input from broader and important perspectives that the guideline group did not encompass (e.g. invited peer review, **public consultation period** with incorporation of feedback and responses from the guideline development group, submitting to peer-reviewed publication).
- **15.8.** Document the internal and external peer review process and, if applicable, publish consultation comments and the guideline development group's responses.

<http://cebgrade.mcmaster.ca/guidelinechecklistonline.html#Reportingtable>

# AGREE II Instrument

Rigour of Development, #13: The guideline has been externally reviewed by experts prior to its publication.

- **Item content includes the following *CRITERIA*:**
  - ▣ purpose and intent of the external review
  - ▣ methods taken to undertake the external review
  - ▣ description of the external reviewers
  - ▣ outcomes/information gathered from the external review (e.g., summary of key findings)
  - ▣ description of how the information gathered was used to inform the guideline development process and/or formation of the recommendations

# IOM Guidelines

- ❑ **7.1** External reviewers should comprise a **full spectrum** of relevant stakeholders
- ❑ **7.2** The authorship of external reviews submitted by individuals and/or organizations should be kept **confidential** unless that protection has been waived by the reviewer(s).
- ❑ **7.3** The GDG should **consider all external reviewer comments** and keep a **written record of the rationale for modifying or not modifying a CPG** in response
- ❑ **7.4** A **draft** of the CPG at the external review stage or immediately following it (i.e., prior to the final draft) should be made **available to the general public for comment.**

# Common problems

Our experts identified areas of difficulty in the peer review process:

- Reviewer expectations
  - ▣ Unfamiliar with GRADE or with role of evidence in guideline process
  - ▣ Misunderstandings about timeline, what will be required, which version they are reviewing
- Reviewer comments
  - ▣ Contradictory comments
  - ▣ Collation of comments is time-consuming
  - ▣ Can be difficult to determine which comments require substantive changes

# Other problems

- Different peer review processes when collaborating between societies
- Need for someone to vet statistical/methodological gray areas
- Need to assess whether GRADE was used correctly

# Lessons learned from our experience

## Operational expertise

- Reviewer list should comprise full spectrum of stakeholders
  - Access to easily searchable database of potential reviewers from a variety of disciplines
  - Experience with balancing reviewer lists to include different clinical specialties, methodologists, organizations, etc.

# Lessons learned from our experience

- Software options
- Reviewer form building, implementation, and collection
  - ▣ COI forms
  - ▣ Reviewer comment forms
    - Structured vs. unstructured
    - Invited reviewers vs. public comments

# Lessons learned from our experience

## Credibility and consistency

- All reviewer comments should be considered; authors should keep written rationale for changes made
  - ▣ Oversight of the disposition document to ensure appropriate responses to all reviewers
  - ▣ Evaluation of themes in reviewer comments across several reports: Help foster consistency in standards

# Lessons learned from our experience

## Accessibility to public for comment

- During or following invited review, draft should be made available to the public for comment

# Next step

- *More extensive effort to collect information about current processes and problems.*
- *Our experience tells us that by managing peer review across organizations, those organizations will become a learning network for sharpening their skills and their methodology.*
- *Please contact us if you are interested in being part of a survey about your peer review procedure and needs:*
  - **Tel: 503-273-5261**
  - **Email: [review@epc-src.org](mailto:review@epc-src.org)**

# References

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