



Reviewing a draft SIGN guideline

Information for lay reviewers

Who are we and what do we do?

The Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN), writes guidelines which give advice to doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, dentists, occupational therapists and patients about the best treatments that are available. We write them by working with doctors, nurses and other NHS staff, and with patients, carers and members of the public. The guidelines are based on the most up-to-date medical evidence.

What are SIGN guidelines for?

We write guidelines to:

- help NHS staff and patients understand medical evidence and use it to make decisions about health care;
- make sure patients get the best care available, no matter where they live; and
- improve health care across Scotland.

Who is involved in developing guidelines?

To develop a SIGN guideline, we bring together a group of people from across Scotland. The group includes:

- NHS staff, for example, doctors, nurses, general practitioners, and physiotherapists; and
- patient and public representatives.

What is a SIGN guideline based on?

Our guidelines are based on medical and scientific research.

Guideline group members read research papers to find evidence for the best ways to diagnose, treat and care for patients.

If no research has been done, the group members use their clinical experience and judgement to suggest treatments.

What is peer review?

Before our guidelines are published draft versions are reviewed by independent clinical experts, or 'peer reviewers'. We ask peer reviewers to comment on the draft guideline by asking themselves the following questions:

- how accurate is the interpretation of the evidence?
- how clear are the recommendations?
- how useful will the guideline be as a working tool?
- does the guideline reflect patients' and carers' views and concerns?

We put all the comments the peer reviewers make into a report that is discussed by the guideline development group. Each point is discussed and we will change the guideline if it is appropriate. If no change is made, we will record the reasons for this.

Why involve patients and carers in peer review?

We invite patients and carers to take part in the peer review of each guideline to make sure that the guideline has considered issues that are important to patients and carers.

We ask lay reviewers (patients, carers and members of the public) to check that patients' and carers' views are reflected throughout the guideline. If you are a lay reviewer you do not have to look at every aspect of the guideline but can comment on those areas in which your experience is most relevant.

We particularly ask lay reviewers to comment on the section called 'information for discussion with patients and carers'. We assure you that we will read and consider every comment you make, but we cannot promise to accept all of them.

Who can become involved?

Anyone can take part in the peer review process, no qualifications are necessary. As a lay reviewer, we do not expect you to have any medical knowledge and it is often better if you don't.

Lay reviewers can help us to judge the clarity of the language used in the guideline. They can point out where medical jargon or terms make the guideline difficult to understand.

What do lay reviewers comment on?

Language

Although our guidelines are written for health professionals, we aim to make them as accessible as possible. As a lay reviewer, it would be helpful if you could answer the following questions:

- ① is each section readable?
- ① are there words or phrases that you do not understand?
- ① is there anything that could be explained more clearly?
- ① is there anything that could be explained more briefly?
- ① do you have any suggestions of plain non-technical wording to help health professionals explain areas of the guideline to patients?
- ① do you feel the tone of the guideline, particularly in the section called 'information for discussion with patients and carers' has the correct balance?

Information for discussion with patients and carers

Each SIGN guideline contains a section called 'information for discussion with patients and carers'. This section is designed for health professionals to use in discussion with patients and carers. It is not meant to be comprehensive educational material designed directly for patients.

We particularly ask lay reviewers to comment on this section and it would be helpful if you could answer the following questions:

- ① do any jargon or technical terms need to be explained?
- ① is the tone of the section appropriate?
- ① is the wording of this section sensitive?
- ① is the information useful for patients and carers?

Can I share my views on the guideline with others?

Draft SIGN guidelines that are sent out to peer reviewers must be treated as confidential documents.

We ask peer reviewers to sign a confidentiality agreement and declaration of interests form. All peer reviewers should be able to act independently of external commercial influences.

The draft guidelines sent out to peer reviewers look like finalised documents, but there are usually many important changes and corrections to be made before they are published. If you would like to share the work of reviewing with others, please get in touch with us to discuss this.

Be prepared to find some sections of the guideline upsetting

The guideline may cover all aspects of the diagnosis, treatment and care of patients and you may find particular sections of the guideline upsetting. If there are any sections of the guideline you do not want to read, simply put them to one side and let us know you haven't reviewed them.

We don't want you to read sections of the guideline you don't feel comfortable with. If you might find some parts upsetting, can you speak to family and friends after you have read the guideline?

If you would like to be put in touch with someone who has experience of lay reviewing guidelines, please contact **Karen Graham, Patient Involvement Officer**, on 0131 718 5108 or email her at karen.graham2@nhs.net

How should I start reviewing a draft guideline?

Following a series of logical steps is a helpful way to review a SIGN guideline. There is no right way to review a guideline, the approach you take will depend on you as an individual. The following approach is one that you may want to consider:

① Gather your thoughts and ideas.

It may be helpful to get a general idea of what the guideline is about.

- Look through the guideline first
- Look at the contents and chapter headings
- Read the introduction
- Read the Quick Reference Guide

You may want to consider some or all of the following questions. Each guideline covers specific issues and you should be aware that not all of these questions apply to every guideline.

- ① What does the title mean to you?
- ① Are you aware of this medical condition?
- ① What questions might people have about the problem or treatment?
- ① What have you heard from other patients or carers in terms of their concerns? (For example, what questions do they ask? What treatments might they be considering? What outcomes might they be hoping for? What side effects might they be concerned about?)
- ① What aspects of treatment and care might be particularly important to patients?
- ① Are you aware of patients or carers being given any information or support?
- ① Are there clear indications of where appropriate support and advice can be obtained?
- ① Who might want to know about the conclusions and recommendations of the guideline?
- ① What is your overall impression of the guideline?

2 Review the guideline.

Read the guideline carefully and consider it in the light of your own experience and expertise. Scribble notes on the text itself, or on a separate sheet of paper.

When you think you understand the guideline, you could try rewriting the main ideas in plain language or imagine trying to explain them to a friend. Ask yourself if it still makes sense.

- ⦿ Are the various sections clearly titled?
- ⦿ Is there a logical thread to the guideline? Is it there from beginning to end or does it disappear?
- ⦿ Are you reacting to the content or to the style of presentation?
- ⦿ Is the language clear and accurate and not too technical?
- ⦿ Are some sentences long or difficult to understand?
- ⦿ Are there any unnecessary abbreviations and is there too much jargon?
- ⦿ Are there any technical words and phrases that could be included in a glossary?
- ⦿ Can you work out the likelihood of a patient benefiting or suffering from the treatment being suggested? Are other findings clearly reported? for example side effects
- ⦿ Are there any sections in the guideline that you think are particularly well written?

③ Send us your comments.

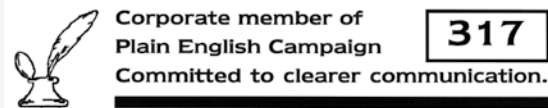
It may be helpful to look back at your notes and consider the following questions.

- If you had any questions have they been answered?
- Can you suggest changes in how the guideline has covered the topic or how it is written?
- Can you separate your responses to the content of the guideline and your responses to the layout of the guideline?
- Have you made your comments in relation to a particular section or sections of the guideline?
- Have you given us positive feedback as well as negative?

When possible, it would be helpful if you try to suggest changes which could improve the text. Explain why you recommend doing it differently and why it is important.

Alternative formats

If you would like a copy of this booklet in another language or format such as large print, please phone Karen Graham, Patient Involvement Officer, on 0131 718 5108 or Email her at karen.graham2@nhs.net



Have you ever read an NHS document and been totally confused?

Become a peer reviewer and you will be given the opportunity to comment on draft guidelines. Not only can you help to make sure that the language used and wording is appropriate, but you can also have your say on how useful it is.



If you need more information on getting involved with us, please contact:

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