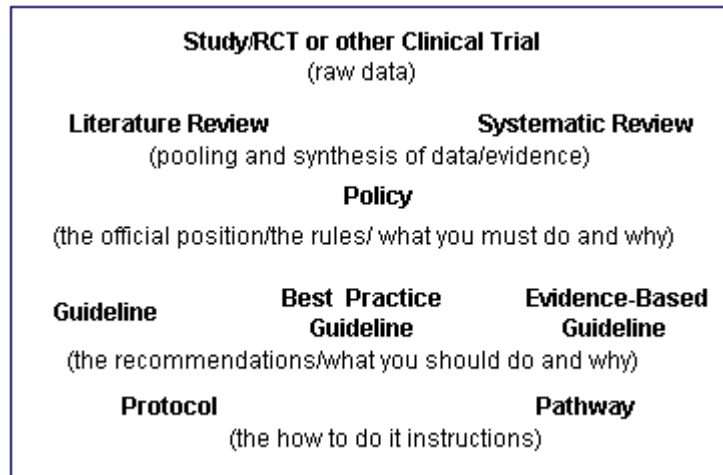


Research to Guidelines Pathway: the journey from research to clinical practice

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Studies and clinical trials

The primary research to establish the evidence for effective and appropriate practice. Each individual study collects data on what works, what doesn't, what the adverse effects are and sometimes information on participant satisfaction levels.

Literature Review

A general review of reported research findings from a range of methodologies and including published work that outlines expert opinion and experience.

Systematic Reviews

- A review technique usually confined to randomised controlled trials RCTs where the data from all RCTs looking at a particular intervention is pooled and synthesised to reach an overall conclusion as to its effectiveness.
- A systematic review may also include a meta-analysis which provides an at-a-glance pictorial result of the review findings
- Reviews should comment on possible explanations for any heterogeneity where there are significant variations between the different studies.
- A systematic review should be explicit and transparent so the review can be readily replicated. It should also be updated regularly so it remains relevant for current use such as with Cochrane Reviews

Guideline

Can be recommendations based on consensus agreement, expert opinion or experience. Some forms of evidence may also be included. The guideline provides the recommended approach but not the practical how to details specified in a protocol or pathway.

Best Practice

guidelines Based on expert opinion - generally used when evidence is limited, of poor quality or conflicting.

Evidence-Based Guideline

- Based on evidence which is explicitly stated and includes levels of evidence
- The guideline is a tool for transferring research findings into a guide for clinical practice

- Follows a clear format and process which is described within the guideline so it can be readily replicated.
- An algorithm or flowchart can be included to provide easy to follow steps that reflect the recommendations outlined in detail within the guideline
- Should be developed in a collaborative manner (to avoid duplication) and involve a multidisciplinary approach with consumer input
- Should include a distribution and communication strategy as well as an implementation plan
- Should include a maintenance strategy for regular review and updating
- Should include an evaluation plan

(The last 3 don't need to be done by the group developing the guideline, but they should be addressed within the guideline, possibly as recommendations)

Policies

These outline the rules and requirements so do not have the flexibility of guidelines, which make recommendations. A policy should provide a clear purpose and rationale for its position and should be regularly reviewed and updated. A policy usually provides the general rules and philosophical position rather than the detail found in a protocol or pathway.

Protocols

A protocol provides the detailed 'how to' instructions for the practitioner. A protocol does not have the flexibility of a guideline but it should ideally be developed from an evidence-based guideline so that there is an evidence-base to the protocol. If such a guideline has not been developed a more detailed approach to the protocol is required that includes reviewing the evidence. A protocol can be developed to adapt a guideline for use in a particular situation, setting, condition or disease.

In addition to providing the clinical rules for practitioners, the protocol can act as a safeguard for consumers/patients as any deviation from the protocol must be explained. Not all situations however, require protocols and it is important that protocols are not used inappropriately to undermine consumer/patient decision-making.

Clinical Pathway

The pathway takes the evidence-based recommendation and the how to instructions of the protocol to the individual patient. It has a focus on the process and outlines precisely how the patient will move through the treatment pathway clearly indicating when there is a deviation from this. A pathway can be helpful in informing practitioners and patients about what to expect and can formalise the inclusion of treatments and interventions of most likely benefit to the particular patient.

A pathway can also serve as a care plan or the pathway can be a part of the overall patient care plan. A pathway has more flexibility than a protocol although an accountability mechanism is usually included to make sure an explanation is provided where there is a deviation from the pathway. A pathway should ideally be developed from an evidence-based guideline so that there is an evidence-base to the pathway. The pathway is after all, describing the course of action that has been demonstrated to be of most likely benefit to the patient. If such a guideline has not been developed a more detailed approach to the pathway is required that includes reviewing the evidence. A pathway can be developed to adapt a guideline for use in a particular situation, setting, condition or disease.