

First steps towards an Italian clinical guideline database

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Introduction

In the last twenty years clinical guidelines became an essential component of clinical practice. Every day clinical decisions, hospital procedures, and government health expenditure are being influenced by guidelines, which are constantly developed in order to assist decisions about appropriate health care for specific clinical circumstances. They are based upon a systematic review of the literature, their role being recognized as useful for clinicians and patients as well.

At an international level there is a large guideline production by governmental agencies, health institutions, and professional societies, to improve patient safety and quality healthcare.

Methods

Over the last year the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (ISS), Italian National Institute of Health, has developed a database collecting the Italian clinical guidelines, produced not only by the Italian National Guideline System, but also by hospitals, local health units, and professional societies. The purpose of the database is to provide a tool addressed to health personnel who need, for various professional reasons, to identify and consult existing guidelines. Guidelines were searched on the Web, analyzed for their quality, and recorded in an in-house-developed archive.

Results

For each selected guideline the title, the corporate and personal authors, the publication date, the link to the full-text of the document, and the MeSH terms in English and in Italian are provided.

Furthermore, the following characteristics are outlined:

- Presence of a bibliography, databases searched and search strategies
- Online full-text availability
- Presence of a grading system to classify the levels of evidence and the strength of recommendations
- Development of monitoring indicators
- Presence of a multidisciplinary panel for the guideline production.

The database contains approximately two hundred clinical guidelines published from 2003.

It is distributed on the Intranet of the ISS but, in the near future, it will be available to general public on the Web, through an *ad hoc* developed interface.