



# First steps towards an Italian Clinical Guideline Database

RR Cammarano, C Di Benedetto, L Felici,  
P Roazzi, M Della Seta  
Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy

# Clinical Guidelines

- 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
- Clinical Guideline:  
*“A systematically developed statement for practitioners and patients about appropriate health care for specific clinical circumstances”*

# Scope Note of the MeSH term *Practice Guidelines as topic*

- Directions or principles presenting current or future rules of policy for assisting health care practitioners in patient care decisions regarding diagnosis, therapy, or related clinical circumstances



# Debate on Guidelines Importance

- 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
- In recent literature, a debate has risen on the effective importance of guidelines
- Considering that the evidence based medicine has led to a proliferation of guidelines, some authors are concerned that many of them are of poor quality, while other colleagues argue that guidelines are important for improving health care



Article published on BMJ 2010;340:c306

## Has guideline development gone astray?

The move to evidence based medicine has led to a proliferation of guidelines. **R Grol** is concerned that many are of poor quality, but **Raymond Gibbons and colleagues** argue that guidelines are important for improving health



# YES

## Reasons

- Guidelines may thus be important for improving patient care, but changes are needed to make them more relevant and effective
- Collaboration between all stakeholders - relevant clinicians, scientists, patients, policy makers, quality improvement experts, and others - is essential to identify clinical questions, assess the evidence, draw up workable recommendations and develop related indicators of improved quality of care and programmes for implementation

# NO Reasons

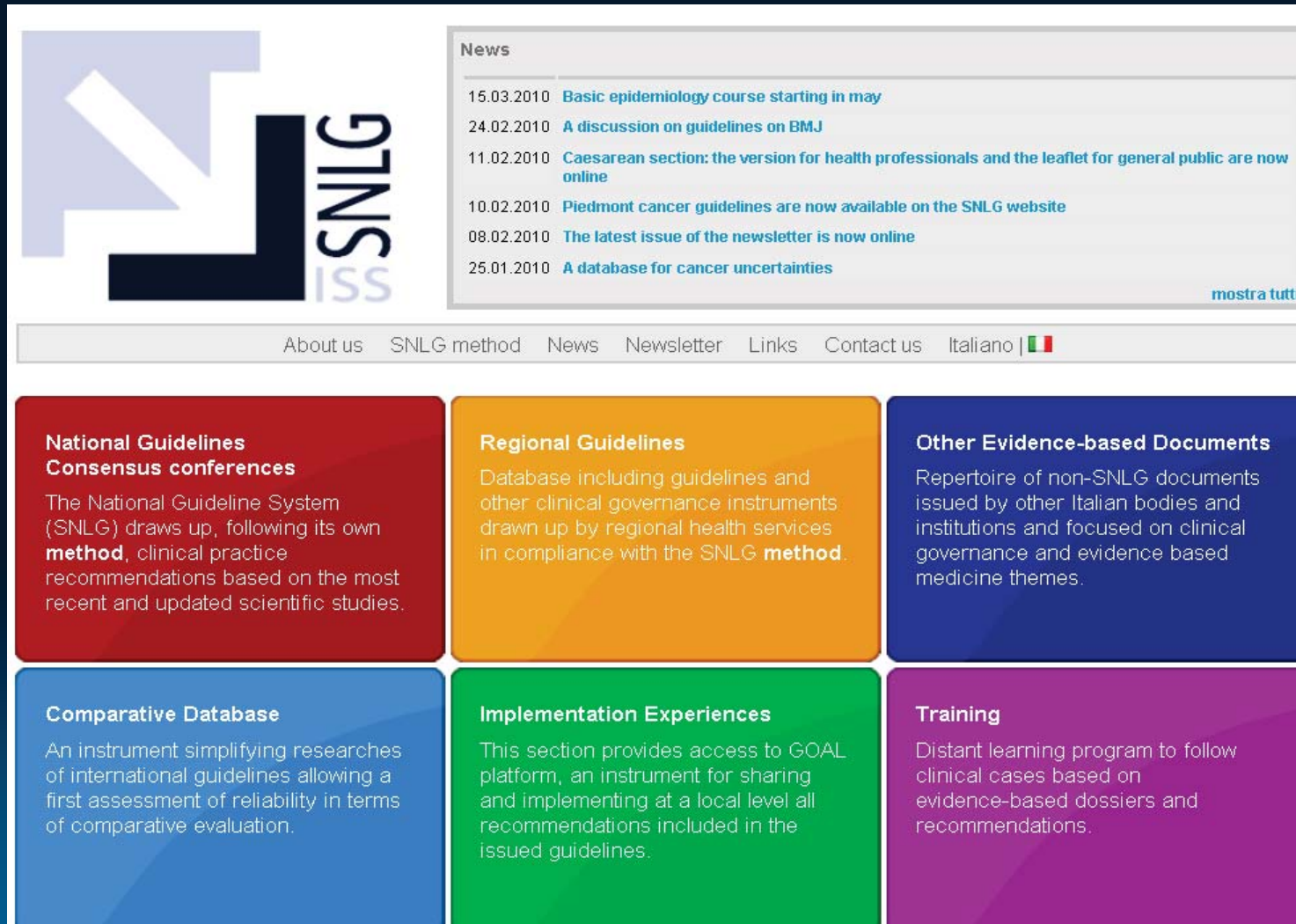
- What are the arguments against guidelines? Firstly, there is concern that many guidelines are based on expert opinion rather than firm evidence. We agree this is a problem, but the solution is to develop more evidence, not to ignore existing evidence and expert consensus.
- The process used for developing guidelines is also not always perfect - that is, not all guidelines are created equal. However, various groups have set out recommendations that lead to sound and effective guidelines, as the US cardiovascular disease example shows

# The Italian Experience

- The Italian National Guideline System (SNLG), set up by the Ministry of Health, is coordinated by the Istituto Superiore di Sanità, the Italian National Institute of Health
- Clinical guidelines are produced by a multidisciplinary panel, which has the task of formulating clinical questions, collecting available evidence and suggesting recommendations



# Italian SNLG Website




The screenshot shows the homepage of the Italian SNLG website. At the top left is the SNLG logo, which consists of a stylized 'S' and 'L' in blue and black, with the text 'SNLG' and 'ISS' below it. To the right of the logo is a 'News' section with a list of five items, each with a date and a blue link. Below the news section is a navigation bar with links for 'About us', 'SNLG method', 'News', 'Newsletter', 'Links', 'Contact us', and 'Italiano' with a small Italian flag icon. The main content area is divided into six colored boxes, each with a title and a brief description of a service or resource provided by the website.

**News**

- 15.03.2010 [Basic epidemiology course starting in may](#)
- 24.02.2010 [A discussion on guidelines on BMJ](#)
- 11.02.2010 [Caesarean section: the version for health professionals and the leaflet for general public are now online](#)
- 10.02.2010 [Piedmont cancer guidelines are now available on the SNLG website](#)
- 08.02.2010 [The latest issue of the newsletter is now online](#)
- 25.01.2010 [A database for cancer uncertainties](#)

[mostra tutti](#)

About us | [SNLG method](#) | [News](#) | [Newsletter](#) | [Links](#) | [Contact us](#) | Italiano | 

**National Guidelines Consensus conferences**  
The National Guideline System (SNLG) draws up, following its own **method**, clinical practice recommendations based on the most recent and updated scientific studies.

**Regional Guidelines**  
Database including guidelines and other clinical governance instruments drawn up by regional health services in compliance with the SNLG **method**.

**Other Evidence-based Documents**  
Repertoire of non-SNLG documents issued by other Italian bodies and institutions and focused on clinical governance and evidence based medicine themes.

**Comparative Database**  
An instrument simplifying researches of international guidelines allowing a first assessment of reliability in terms of comparative evaluation.

**Implementation Experiences**  
This section provides access to GOAL platform, an instrument for sharing and implementing at a local level all recommendations included in the issued guidelines.

**Training**  
Distant learning program to follow clinical cases based on evidence-based dossiers and recommendations.

# Specific tasks of SNLG

- Producing information useful to address the decisions of health personnel towards a greater effectiveness and appropriateness, and towards a greater efficiency in the use of available resources
- Making the clinical practice guidelines easily accessible
- Evaluating guidelines impact, in terms of results and organization

# An easily-accessible Italian guideline database

- New tool giving access to all guidelines produced in Italy
- Specifically intended and designed for the use of health care professionals
- Near future: free on the Internet for patients, carers and the general public as well

# The ISS database

- 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
- Guidelines were searched on the Web, analyzed for their quality, and recorded in an in-house-developed archive



# Criteria for inclusion in the ISS Guideline Database

- To be produced by a government agency, a hospital, a local health unit or a professional society
- To be developed in Italy
- To be developed, reviewed or updated as from 2003
- To be written in Italian language
- To be available on the Internet free of charge

# Database fields

- Title
- Corporate and personal authors
- Publication date
- Revision date
- Link to full-text of the document
- Italian MeSH terms
- Addressees: Patients or Care-givers

# Other characteristics (1)

- Presence of a bibliography
- Presence of a list of databases searched for developing the guideline
- Explicit search strategies
- 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

## Other characteristics (2)

- If a grading system of the recommendations expressed by the guideline is present, the adopted schema is reported in the database
- If the guideline complies with the criteria adopted by the Italian SNLG (searched databases, declared search strategies, multidisciplinary panel, monitoring indicators) it will be stated in the database that the guideline matches the SNLG criteria



# Present and Future

- Over 250 clinical guidelines published since 2003
- Distributed on the Intranet of the ISS
- Soon available to the general public on the Web
- Web interface is in the course of being developed

# The home page of the Italian Guideline Database



**Guidelines  
menu**

**New Clinical Guideline**

**Guidelines**

**Management of  
Corporate  
Authors/Addressees**

**Close**

# The data entry form of the Italian Guideline Database (first part)

Key

Guideline management

Title

Authors

Publication date

Date Reviewed

WEB

URL

Bibliography

Si  No

Online full-text

Si  No

Grading

Si  No

If Yes specify

Monitoring indicators

Si  No

Multidisciplinary panel

Si  No

Databases searched

Si  No

Search strategy

Si  No

SNLG Criteria

Si  No

# The data entry form of the Italian Guideline Database (second part)

The screenshot displays a data entry interface with a blue and grey color scheme. At the top, a 'File' section contains a text input field and a 'File type' dropdown menu. Below this is a record navigation bar with 'Record:' followed by navigation icons and a text box containing '1', and 'di 1'. The interface is divided into two columns: 'Corporate author' and 'Addressees', each with a dropdown menu and its own record navigation bar. The 'Mesh' section at the bottom features a text input field and another record navigation bar. A dark blue footer bar contains the buttons 'New', 'Duplicate', 'Save', and 'Close'.



# Conclusions

- Guideline development is a time-consuming and expensive process
- In a previous paper by the authors of this contribution it was estimated that the expenditure for a guideline on “Early Intervention in Schizophrenia” (produced in 2006) was more than nine thousand Euros, considering only the costs for documentary work
- Other authors argue that the total cost per guideline is about 150 000 € in the Netherlands, and more than £ 400 000 for a NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence, UK) guideline

# Conclusions

- Therefore, the authors believe that it is very important to create and manage appropriate tools for detecting existing guidelines, in order to decide whether produce a new one or simply update or revise an already developed one
- Furthermore, the development of an Italian register of guidelines may be useful for identifying research groups working on a specific health topic

# Thank you for your Attention

