

What kind of publication types are referred in guidelines – are the references up-to-date enough?

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Background

It is essential that publication types of good quality are the basis for the evidence in clinical practice guidelines.

Objectives

The aim is to analyze publication types referred in two guidelines and also find out if those references are up-to-date enough.

Methods

Two psoriasis guidelines were studied, one by Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN)¹ and other by Current Care, the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim². As these guidelines vastly discuss the treatment of psoriasis, there exists a lot of clinical trials. References found in Medline were studied and categorized by publication type based on the Medline indexing.

Results

In SIGN's psoriasis guideline there were 217 and in Current Care (CC) guideline 240 references. How up-to-date the references were, was studied by comparing the publication year of each reference to the publication year of the guideline. The mean values of publication years were -7.2 for SIGN and -8.0 for CC guideline. The timeliness of the references was quite similar in both guidelines.

The publication types used in both guidelines were analyzed: the number of referred guidelines, systematic reviews or meta-analysis, randomized controlled trials and clinical trials were calculated. The proportion of these publication types of better quality was about fifty-fifty in both guidelines. The other half was for example journal articles, editorials and literature reviews.

The most visible difference was that the SIGN guideline referred significantly more to secondary publication types, guidelines, systematic reviews and meta-analysis as in Current Care guideline primary publications were used more often (see Figure 1). An interesting observation was that only 25 articles were used in both guidelines even when the topic and publication year were almost the same.

The references of CC guideline were analyzed further by analyzing references cited only in the evidence summaries (see Figure 2).

Conclusions

Only half of the references used in both guidelines were publication types of better quality. After studying closer the references used in the CC guideline evidence summaries it can be concluded that continuous attention must be paid on the publication types of the articles during the process. In Finland the timeliness and significance of the publication types of the articles is taught in several workshops.

As there were so few same articles used in the comparable guidelines the reasons should be studied more deeply. Education in critical assessment of the literature must be regularly offered to the guideline writers.

It can also be concluded that professional information specialists are needed for skillful filtering of the articles to be used.

This minor study shows a trend of the literature used in the guidelines. Education of critical assessment of the literature is a good way to direct the attention to the quality of references.

Figure 1. Publication types used in the SIGN and Current Care Psoriasis guidelines.

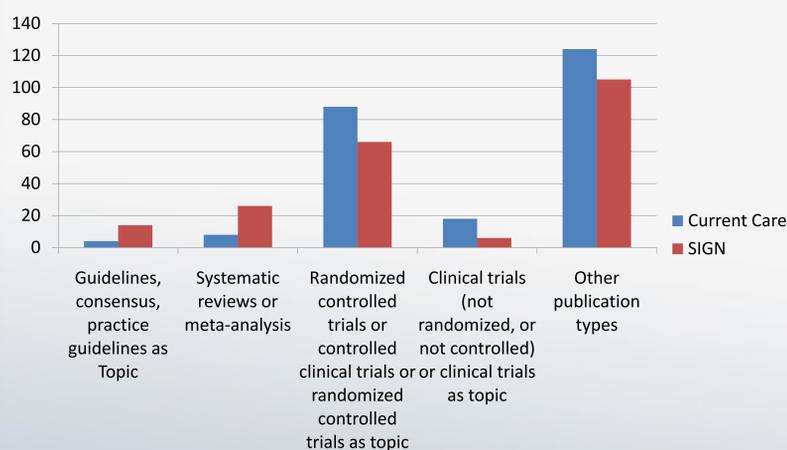
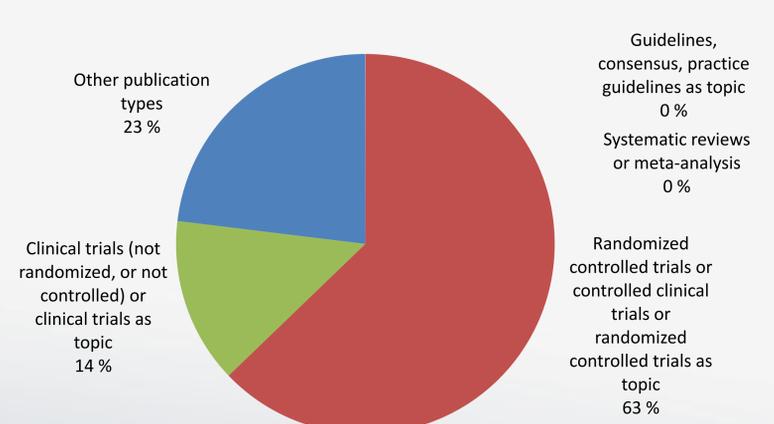


Figure 2. Publication types used in the Current Care Psoriasis guidelines' evidence summaries.



References:

¹ Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN). Diagnosis and management of psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis in adults. Edinburgh: SIGN; 2010. (SIGN publication no. 121). Available from URL: www.sign.ac.uk

² The diagnosis and treatment of psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis (online). Current Care guideline. Working group set up by the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim and the Finnish Dermatological Society. Helsinki: The Finnish Medical Society Duodecim, 2007. Available online at: www.kaypahoito.fi