

Clinical Review Articles: User-Friendly Guides to Primary Care Practice

Optimizing clinical decision-making and enhancing quality and efficiency are some of the usefulness of clinical practice guidelines (CPGs). This multi-faceted usefulness of CPGs is achieved through evidence-based support, reducing variation in care, improving outcomes, cost and efficiency.¹ However, as CPGs tend to be lengthy, they may not be handy or friendly for busy primary care physicians. Furthermore, the development of clinical practice guidelines requires substantial time and resources,² whether it be in the international or local setting. The tediousness of developing a clinical practice guideline and getting it approved in the local setting was witnessed by the team headed by Dr. Endrik H. Sy, who worked on the Clinical Practice Guideline and Pathways for the Evaluation and Management of Patients with Dizziness in Family and Community Practice. Despite these challenges, the Academy and its committees continue with innovative efforts to generate evidence that can help physicians in their clinical decision-making process and improve patient care and the practice of family and community medicine.

In line with the mission of the Philippine Academy of Family Physicians (PAFP) to advance holistic care for individuals, families, and communities, the PAFP Knowledge Management Committee through the Medical Writers Group, decided to adopt a new approach in generating evidence-based guides by developing the PAFP Clinical Review Articles. Unlike lengthy CPGs, clinical review articles provide a concise overview and selective summary of existing medical literature and current available evidence on a specific topic or disease.³ As the first and initial clinical review articles, topics and diseases with no corresponding clinical practice guidelines were prioritized, such as back pain, headache, depression in the elderly and dementia.

The first two articles by Dulay et al on evaluation of back pain in primary care, and Sy et al, on the evaluation of headache, contain useful mnemonics in remembering red flags of these conditions, which emphasize the important role of family physicians in triaging these conditions and recognizing red flags that warrant further investigation and referral. The next two clinical review articles were written given the rising incidence of mental health issues locally and globally. The Evaluation of Depression in Primary Care by Sy et al contains recommendations on how to screen, evaluate, and diagnose adult and elderly patients with major depressive disorder guided by the DSM-5 and validated tools. The last the article on evaluation and management of patients with dementia includes patient-centered, family-focused, and community-oriented management recommendations.

The development of each clinical review article adapts the steps of the Department of Health guideline development handbook.⁴ Topic selection was done by assessment and prioritization based on disease burden, public interest, impact to improve health outcomes, and urgency for a guideline to be developed. A technical working group was then established based on their topic and methodological expertise. The objectives, scope, and target audience were defined to clarify and determine the type and characteristics of the clinical review article. Literature review was conducted through a search of available clinical guidelines in trusted medical databases and subsequently appraised to determine if they followed rigorous evidence generation process and if applicable to the objectives of the article. Initial drafts were then presented to the members of the Medical Writers Group for comments and suggestions. Finally, the clinical review article was submitted for evaluation, approval and publication by the editorial board of The Filipino Family Physician.

The PAFP clinical review articles are evidence-based and follow a systematic approach to develop concise recommendations on a specific aspect of a disease. They are easier to develop and provide short and relevant guidance to primary care physicians and family-community medicine specialists. We hope that this approach can help address the difficulties encountered in developing, implementing and using clinical practice guidelines.

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References

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