Medication & Rationality – a practical example of reasonable pharmacotherapy and co-operation among various stakeholders

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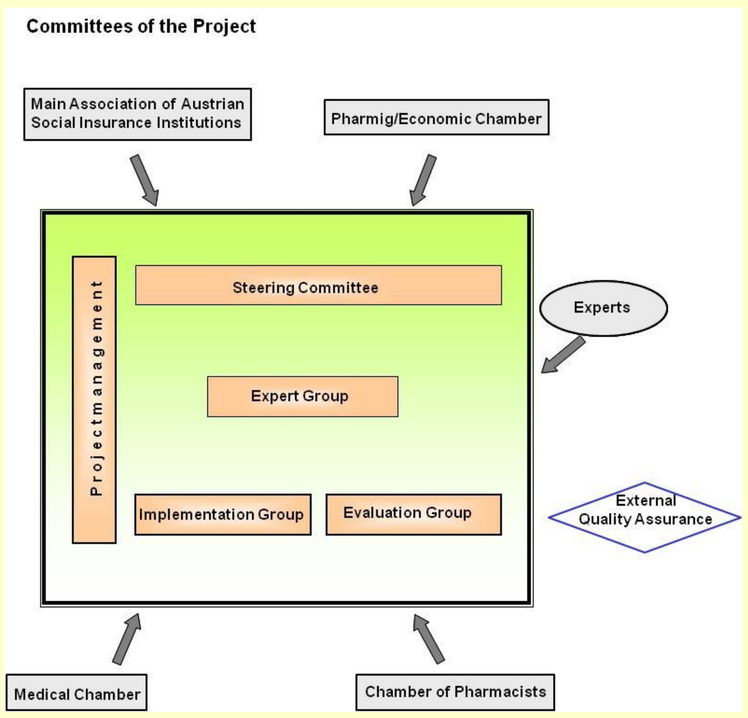
OBJECTIVES

Medication&Rationality is a joint project of the Main Association of Austrian Social Insurance Institutions, the Association of the Austrian Pharmaceutical Industry (Pharmig)/Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the Medical Chamber and the Chamber of Pharmacists. The main objective of the initiative is to provide independent national therapy guidelines and respective patient brochures at a high scientific level on a tight budget.
Independence is ensured by the following requirements and principles:

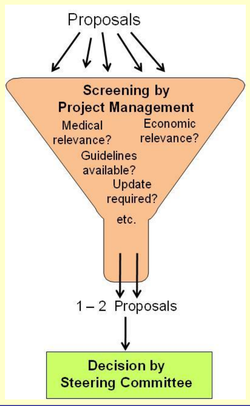
- equally shared funding
- rules of procedure
- external quality assurance
- declaration of conflicts of interest
- avoidance of brand names



METHODS

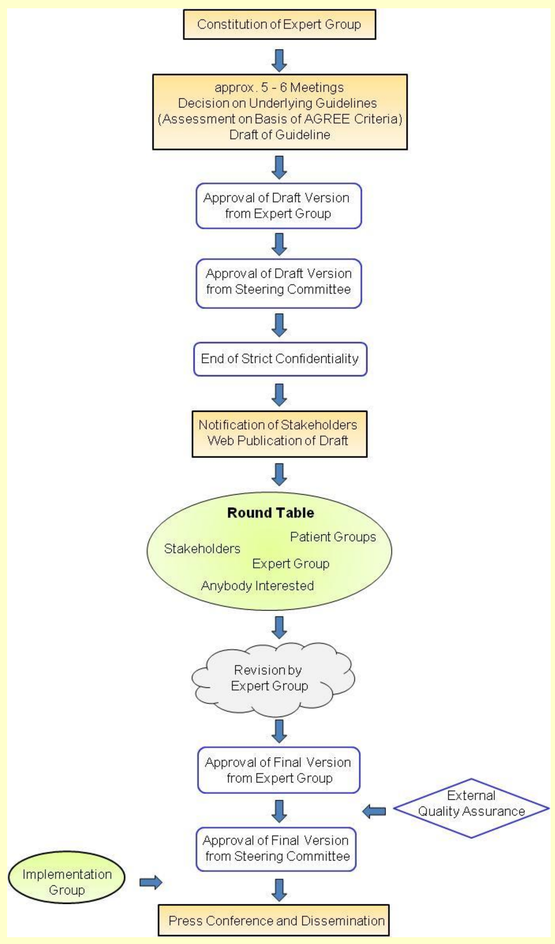
Selection of Topic

Proposals for a new guideline or for an update of an already existing guideline may be submitted by mail or email by anybody provided the reasons are described in detail. Proposals received are screened by the project management for various criteria such as medical and economic relevance, thus reducing their number to one or two, which are put to the Steering Committee, where the final decision is taken by vote. Although the rules of procedure provide for simple majority in this case, so far unanimity has always been sought to ensure backing by all members.

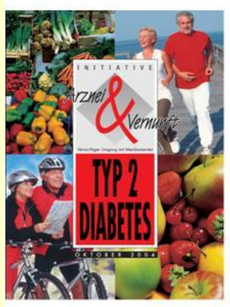


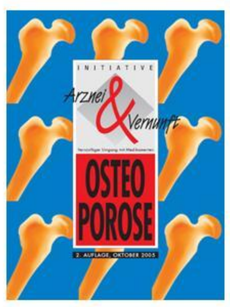
Drafting the Guideline

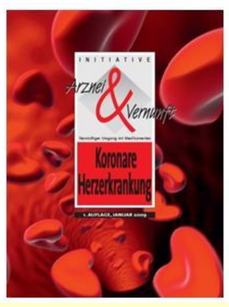
Once a topic has been agreed on, the Expert Group has to be set up accordingly. The chair of the Expert Group, its only permanent member, invites independent acknowledged experts, who take part in the project at no charge, considering balance with regard to criteria such as geography, medical fields or university background vs. hospital. In addition, each project party is allowed to nominate two representatives.
The first task of the Expert Group is to decide which existing guideline(s) – if available at all – shall constitute the basis of the M&R guideline. For this purpose a systematic guideline research is carried out, resulting in a shortlist of eligible guidelines, which are further narrowed down by assessment on the basis of the AGREE Instrument by members of the Expert Group. The guideline(s) thus selected as well as a link to the documentation of the process are stated in the M&R guideline. Levels of evidence and recommendation are supplied in the printed version as well as in the online version of the guideline; bibliographical reference is – for lack of space - only provided online.
To draft the guideline, the experts prepare proposals for each chapter, which are then consolidated and circulated by the project management and discussed in the course of a meeting. This process is repeated until a consensus has been reached, which takes approximately five to six meetings and extensive communication by email.
After the approval of the Steering Committee the draft of the guideline is published on an internet platform, where stakeholders are offered a chance to state comments provided that specified rules such as proving their claims by quoting references are fulfilled. In addition, a round table meeting is held to give patient organisations and other stakeholders the opportunity to discuss the draft with members of the Expert Group. Whether any modifications or amendments are considered necessary due to this feedback, is at the experts' discretion. At all events, further approval from the Steering Committee is required before publishing the final version of the guideline.



RESULTS







Download: (German)
www.sozialversicherung.at/arzneiundvernunft

1997	Infections (being updated)
1999	Blood Lipids (update being considered)
2000	Lifestyle (patient information only)
2001	Asthma and COPD I (adults)
2001	Asthma and COPD II (children)
2001	Asthma and COPD III (COPD)
2003	Gastric Diseases
2004	Diabetes Type 2
2005	Osteoporosis
2006	Depressive Disorder
2007	Coronary Heart Disease

In Progress: Update Infections
Update Osteoporosis

Patient Brochure

Each guideline comes with a brochure for patients in plain language, which gives a definition of the disease, explains the risk factors and symptoms, gives an overview of treatment options and offers comprehensive advice on both prevention and lifestyle, if already afflicted by the disease.

Dissemination

The guideline is published in print and online and presented at a press conference. Simultaneously, a free guideline and patient brochure are dispatched to every general practitioner registered with the Medical Chamber, to respective medical specialists and hospital departments and to the members of the project parties. Patients may obtain their brochures from pharmacies and doctors' offices.

External Quality Assurance

After each of the following milestones

- selection of topic
- draft/final version of guideline
- implementation plan
- evaluation plan
- evaluation report

an external quality assessment of the process – not of the contents – is carried out. The respective report is presented to the Steering Committee for information.

EVALUATION

It is well known that M&R guidelines are just one factor of influence among many others on the prescribing habits of general practitioners and that therefore possible changes in prescribing cannot be attributed solely to the guideline. However, it is important to compare medication usage before and after publishing a new guideline to check whether there have been any changes consistent with the recommendations of the guideline.

CONCLUSIONS

Compared to other guideline issuing institutions, Medication&Rationality has only a tight budget at its disposal. Yet, the guidelines are generally popular and known for their independence.
All partners show a high interest in developing the process further and improving it constantly. However, beside the financial restrictions, it should be taken into account that the guidelines are primarily intended for practical use by general practitioners rather than for scientific audience.