Clinical practice guidelines provide physicians with information that can be used to improve the quality of clinical decisions. Because Mayo Clinic Proceedings has the third largest print circulation of all indexed biomedical journals, it provides an ideal platform for dissemination of guidelines to a broad audience of generalist and specialist physicians who are active in clinical practice. Based on this resource, we invite clinical practice guideline development groups to consider submitting their guidelines for publication in the Proceedings. In addition to the usual practice of solo publishing guidelines, the Proceedings will also consider jointly publishing guidelines and related articles in collaboration with other journals and organizations that have shared audiences (as the Proceedings has done in the past) as a means of disseminating recommendations to a wider readership.

The purpose of clinical practice guidelines is to translate complex, and often conflicting, research findings into practical recommendations for clinical implementation. Useful guidelines provide guidance to busy clinicians but at the same time allow opportunity to understand the evidence behind each recommendation. The intended result of clinical practice guidelines is that patients will benefit from optimal, evidence-based health care and outcomes.

The primer by Murad in this issue of the Proceedings directs the reader through the methodological standards for guideline development. By providing a clear outline of important guideline considerations, this primer can constructively lead multidisciplinary groups through the process of developing useful guidelines. Murad also describes a multilayered approach that allows a busy clinician to quickly access guideline recommendations but also permits deeper layers of evaluation of the evidence behind the recommendations.

Several challenges accompany the development of high-quality clinical practice guidelines. Diverse groups produce clinical practice guidelines, including specialty societies, disease advocacy groups, governmental agencies, and health plans. Variable methodologies and quality of guideline development processes can result in differing conclusions, and separate groups may produce conflicting guidelines. In order for guidelines to improve outcomes, it is critical to ensure they are unbiased, scientifically valid, and trustworthy.

The US National Academy of Medicine (formerly the Institute of Medicine) has established “guidelines for guidelines,” describing the methodology for developing clinical practice guidelines (Table). A systematic review of the literature is part of the evaluation of evidence, and the search terms, dates, and languages included in the literature review should be clearly stated in clinical practice guidelines. The GRADE approach (Grades of Recommendation, Assessment, Development and Evaluation) distinguishes the quality of evidence supporting a recommendation from the strength of a guideline recommendation.

We not only welcome clinical practice guideline submissions to Mayo Clinic Proceedings but also encourage submission of manuscripts that assess the feasibility of guideline implementation, address implementation strategies, measure guideline adherence, reconcile disparate guidelines, and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of guidelines on health and economic outcomes.

As is the case with all other manuscripts submitted to Mayo Clinic Proceedings, decisions to publish a given guideline manuscript in the Journal will be based on rigorous peer review and Editorial Board oversight, using methodologies described previously. These methodologies prioritize manuscripts for publication primarily on the basis of 2 major criteria: (1) is the information relevant to the Journal’s target audience? and (2) is the information credible, important, and novel?

Authors who anticipate developing clinical practice guidelines for submission to the Proceedings are encouraged to share their intentions with the Journal so that the
TABLE. Summary of National Academy of Medicine Standards for Trustworthy Clinical Practice Guidelines

1. Transparency of guideline development process and funding
2. Management of conflit of interest in members of guideline development group
3. Guideline development group composition is multidisciplinary
4. Interaction of clinical and systematic review experts regarding scope, approach, and outcomes
5. Establish the evidence for and rate the strength of recommendations
6. Articulate clearly the recommended action
7. External review by a spectrum of relevant stakeholders
8. Updating guidelines when new evidence suggests the need for modification

Adapted from the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. 

editorial leadership may assist them in assessing the appropriateness of the subject matter for possible distribution to the Proceedings’ readership. However, such discussions are not a prerequisite for submission; all authors are welcomed to engage their clinical practice guidelines with the Journal, provided those guidelines meet the aforementioned criteria.

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On behalf of the Mayo Clinic Proceedings Editorial Board

REFERENCES