

Sources of high quality and credible recommendations in health care settings

Abstract

In the ever-evolving field of healthcare, recommendations are pivotal in guiding clinical practices, policy decisions, and patient care. This study delves into the myriad sources of recommendations within the healthcare sector, critically assessing their credibility, influence, and impact on medical outcomes. Central sources discussed include clinical guidelines from professional bodies, expert consensus, peer-reviewed research, pharmaceutical advisories, patient reviews, and AI-driven decision support systems. Through a comprehensive analysis, the study underscores the importance of evidence-based recommendations while acknowledging the role of experiential and patient-centered perspectives. Ultimately, this exploration aims to inform healthcare stakeholders about the multifaceted nature of recommendations and their potential to drive improvements in medical practice and policy.

The Oxford dictionary defines recommendation as a suggestion or proposal as to the best course of action, especially one put forward by an authoritative body or person. More formally, it's often defined as an action of recommending something or someone.¹ In health care setting recommendations are guidelines or suggestions provided by experts to inform healthcare decisions and practices. Recommendations are very critical in health sector because they help ensure that healthcare practices are based on the best available evidence, leading to improved patient outcomes.^{2,3} This study explored the various sources of recommendations that health workers can rely on to improve health outcomes across all programs especially maternal health.

Key sources of recommendations in health

They are various sources of recommendations in the health sector. These include but not limited to the following:

Clinical practice guidelines: (CPGs) are systematically developed statements to assist practitioner and patient decisions about appropriate health care for specific clinical circumstances. Issued by third-party organizations, these guidelines define the role of specific diagnostic and treatment modalities in the diagnosis and management of patients. The statements contain recommendations that are based on evidence from a rigorous systematic review and synthesis of the published medical literature. These guidelines are not fixed protocols that must be followed, but are intended for health care professionals and providers to consider. While they identify and describe generally recommended courses of intervention, they are not presented as a substitute for the advice of a physician or other knowledgeable health care professional or provider.⁴ They help ensure that care is consistent and based on the latest research and expert consensus.^{5,6}

Systematic reviews

A systematic review is a type of literature review that collects and critically analyse multiple research studies or papers on a specific topic. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic reviews employ a well-defined methodology to minimize bias and provide more reliable and comprehensive evidence.⁷

Systematic reviews are a cornerstone of evidence-based practice and decision-making across various disciplines, including healthcare, education, and social sciences. They offer a rigorous and structured approach to synthesizing research findings from multiple studies to address a specific research question. This essay explores the definition, importance, methodology, and challenges associated with systematic reviews, along with relevant references for further reading.⁸

Systematic reviews are vital because they Summarize vast amounts of research, Identify gaps in current knowledge, Provide evidence for policy-making and practice. Enhance the quality and transparency of research.⁹⁻¹¹ Despite the advantages systematic reviews have they also have some challenges such as time-consuming nature of the process, difficulty in accessing all relevant studies, variability in study quality and methodologies, Potential for publication bias.

Systematic reviews are an essential tool for synthesizing research evidence and informing decision-making. By following a rigorous methodology, they provide a reliable and comprehensive overview of existing knowledge on a specific topic. However, researchers must be aware of the challenges and limitations associated with systematic reviews to ensure their findings are accurate and meaningful. Hence a good source of evidence based recommendations.

Professional medical societies

Professional medical bodies play a crucial role in shaping healthcare practices and policies. These organizations, composed of experts in various medical fields, provide evidence-based recommendations that guide clinical practice, public health initiatives, and healthcare policies. This essay explores the reasons why professional medical bodies are considered reliable sources of recommendations, supported by relevant references.¹¹

Expertise and credibility

Professional medical bodies are composed of highly qualified and experienced healthcare professionals, researchers, and academics. Their collective expertise ensures that the recommendations they provide are based on the latest scientific evidence and best practices. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) develops global guidelines through a rigorous quality assurance process, ensuring that each guideline is trustworthy and meets the highest international standards.¹¹

Evidence-based approach

One of the primary reasons professional medical bodies are trusted sources of recommendations is their commitment to evidence-based practice. These organizations systematically review and analyse research findings to develop guidelines that are grounded in robust scientific evidence. The Guidelines Review Committee of the WHO, for instance, ensures that recommendations are developed through a transparent, evidence-based decision-making process.¹¹

Standardization and consistency

Professional medical bodies provide standardized guidelines that promote consistency in healthcare practices. This standardization helps reduce variability in clinical practice, ensuring that patients receive high-quality care regardless of where they are treated. The General Medical Council (GMC) in the UK, for example, sets out principles and standards of professional behaviour expected of all registered doctors, promoting a consistent approach to patient care.¹²

Ethical considerations

Professional medical bodies prioritize ethical considerations in their recommendations. They ensure that guidelines are developed with the best interests of patients and the public in mind. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) outlines standards of conduct, performance, and ethics that healthcare professionals must adhere to, ensuring that recommendations are ethically sound and protect patient welfare.¹³

Governmental and non-governmental organizations

Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a pivotal role in shaping policies, practices, and public opinion across various sectors. Their recommendations are highly valued due to their credibility, expertise, and evidence-based approach. This section explores the advantages of using government and NGOs as sources of recommendations, supported by relevant references. Agencies and organizations that issue health recommendations based on research and expert consensus.

Credibility and authority

Government organizations have the legal and regulatory authority to issue recommendations that often shape national policies and standards. Their recommendations are based on thorough research and are developed by experts in the field. For example, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States provides authoritative guidelines on public health issues, which are widely trusted and followed (CDC, 2024).¹⁴

Comprehensive data and research

Government organizations have access to extensive data and research resources, enabling them to provide well-informed recommendations. They conduct large-scale studies and surveys to gather accurate and reliable information. For instance, the World Health Organization (WHO) conducts global health assessments and provides evidence-based recommendations to improve public health outcomes (WHO, 2024).¹⁵

Expertise and specialized knowledge

Both government and NGOs employ experts with specialized knowledge in various fields. These professionals contribute their expertise to develop recommendations that are informed by the latest

scientific evidence and best practices. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in the UK, for example, provides guidelines based on comprehensive reviews of clinical evidence conducted by experts (NICE, 2024).¹⁶

Independence and objectivity

NGOs, in particular, are valued for their independence and objectivity. They often operate without direct government control, allowing them to provide unbiased recommendations that prioritize the needs and welfare of communities. Organizations like Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) provide impartial recommendations based on their fieldwork and first-hand experiences (MSF, 2024).¹⁷

Advocacy and accountability

NGOs play a crucial role in advocating for social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability. Their recommendations often focus on addressing systemic issues and promoting positive change. NGOs like Amnesty International provide recommendations to governments and international bodies to improve human rights practices (Amnesty International, 2024).¹⁸ Using government and NGO recommendations offers numerous advantages, including credibility, comprehensive data, expertise, independence, and advocacy. Their guidelines and recommendations play a crucial role in shaping policies, practices, and public opinion, ultimately contributing to the betterment of society.

In conclusion recommendations must be developed by credible sources and directly linked to data or expert opinions for them to be effective in improving health care. There is no one superior source of recommendation than the other and therefore all the above sources must be used so as to have wider sources of recommendation. Continuous research and collaboration among experts will be crucial for developing and updating health recommendations.

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