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From knowledge to action. Clinical practice guidelines, electronic medical record and change management.

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Justification: Clinical practice guidelines (CPG) have been introduced to bridge the gap between research and practice. There is evidence that guidelines are effective in changing the process and outcome of care, provided that their implementation into daily practice is successful.

Objectives: To support professional decision-making and organisation transparency by monitoring the implementation of CPG through electronic patient records (EPR), to improve health outcomes. Scope: primary care, in the context of a public health service.

Methods:

1. Indicators' development process: a) definition of relevant and useful clinical indicators for 20 prioritized diseases. Methodology involved CPG selection, enumeration of recommendations and consensus-based selection by practicing physicians; and, b) with the participation of external reviewers from primary and secondary healthcare professionals, RAND methodology was used to assess which indicators required continuous monitoring and so, standardization of data in EPR. In a second stage, the indicators were reviewed and refined, using the Delphi method.

2. Change-management activities and tools: a) extension of knowledge of CPG and prioritised indicators through online training and virtual library; b) single EPR; c) accessibility in office practice incorporating indicators into EPR, accompanied by tools for their exploitation and monitoring; c) measures to improve availability of professionals' time, with modifications to staff and organisation; and d) professional management and incentive model targeted at implementing EPR and monitoring prioritized clinical indicators.

Results: a) 2,400 (100%) trained primary care physicians; b) 98% general practitioners with computerised consultation and access to virtual library; c) 50% primary care professionals (general practitioners, nurses,...) with access to EPR; d) feasibility of the proposed indicators tested through auditing.

Discussion: Implementation of EPR affords an excellent opportunity to reduce the gap between the achievable and the achieved. Nevertheless, such records must encompass scientific-professional as well as organisational aspects.