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The Consultation Period as an Implementation Tool for Guidelines-Methods and Results

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Background: The consultation period following the production of a first guideline draft is an important means of assuring guideline quality as well as implementation by generating a sense of ownership. Since the creation of the Programme for German National Disease Management Guidelines (NDMGs), seven NDMGs have gone through a standardized three month consultation period.

Purpose: Over the course of the years, we have increasingly received comments during the consultation period. In order to gain a better understanding of this development, we analysed the quantitative and qualitative results of the NDMG consultation periods over time.

Methods: We compiled the following information from the completed consultation periods for NDMGs published so far: 1) how many comments, 2) who sent comments, 3) what kind of comments (editorial, substantial), 4) when in the consultation process were the comments sent, 5) which implications did the comments have for the final version of the guideline.

Results: Public feedback during the consultation period of NDMGs has considerably increased over the years. The number of comments has more than tripled from the first to the last consultation period completed (from 26 comments to 94). The majority of comments come from an expert public and are relevant to central aspects of the guidelines. In particular, we are now receiving more comments from pharmaceutical companies and office-based physicians. Most comments are received towards the end of the three month period.

Discussion: Our results illustrate that the consultation period has developed into a widely accepted and relevant implementation tool for guidelines and indicate that public perception of the importance of NDMGs is growing. In the future we will work on how to make the consultation periods more effective and on encouraging primary care physicians to give more feedback on the clarity and applicability of the guidelines.