

Conference abstract: applying the GRADE process in a national guidelines programme.

Background: The Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) has been producing national guidelines for the National Health Service in Scotland since 1993. For most of that time it has used a grading system developed in-house (and subsequently widely adopted elsewhere). SIGN has now decided to adopt the GRADE approach to grading recommendations in the future.

Issues: Making such a major change to a well-established programme is not straightforward. This presentation looks at the steps in the GRADE methodology and how they relate to wider aspects of the guideline development process. Particular attention will be paid to patient involvement, and how GRADE deals with areas other than clinical interventions.

Prospects: The benefits of the GRADE approach will be highlighted, and an attempt made to pick out those aspects of guideline development processes where most work has still to be done to take full advantage of the new approach.

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Mr. Harbour trained as a librarian, and since graduating in 1968 has worked in a range of scientific and technical organisations. He has also gained an honours degree in biology through part-time study, as well as various management and language qualifications.

He has been involved with information retrieval since the introduction of online computerised information systems in the early 1970s. He is the author of a (now very dated) book on library automation, as well as several articles on literature searching and guideline methodology.

Since 1996 he has worked for the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network, and was responsible for much of the early development of their methodology. His main current responsibilities are the development of the systematic review process, and methods used for the grading of recommendations, as well as the development of quality assurance procedures for the guideline development process.