

Cost-conscious high-quality care and guideline development education

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Cost-conscious high-quality care and guideline development education: a strange contradiction or simple solution?

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Knowledge about cost-consciousness is limited amongst health professionals [1]. There is even scepticism about the concept of sustainable care. This scepticism is rooted in discomfort about lack of certainty, patient demand for services, fear of malpractice and/or financial incentives that are not in line with cost-consciousness. Health professionals will be more inclined to practise sustainable care if information about costs (e.g through guidelines) is more readily available during the decision process [1].

Motivation to use guidelines will increase if professionals are involved in developing them. In 2018, a European consortium (CoCoCare) started a collaboration in order to improve the knowledge and use of guidelines. This consortium aims to develop a state-of-the-art educational programme for residents across Europe. The objective is twofold: (1) to teach residents how to develop and implement high-quality, evidence-based guidelines and (2) to equip residents with the competences to work more cost-consciously.

In order to perform a needs analysis, the consortium conducted a survey amongst health professionals in Europe. The survey consisted of one question and asked about the agreement to two statements:

- (1) Are medical specialists sufficiently able to develop and implement guidelines?
- (2) Medical specialists need knowledge about cost-consciousness in relation to quality care in order to provide sustainable quality care.
- (3) Medical specialists play an increasing role in balancing optimal quality of care and optimal cost containment.

Sixty-eight professionals responded. Of these, only 40% considered medical specialists sufficiently capable of developing and implementing guidelines, 96% were of the opinion that medical specialists are in need of knowledge about cost-consciousness in relation to quality care in order to provide sustainable quality care, and 90% believed that medical specialists play an increasing role in balancing optimal quality of care and optimal cost containment. However, according to Colla *et al.* [1], only a minority of medical professionals

(37%) take costs into consideration when deciding on treatment options. At the same time, the majority of our respondents felt unable to develop guidelines (with or without cost information).

Despite the importance of medical guidelines for sustainable healthcare, and despite the lack of knowledge on how to develop them (economic evaluations included), current medical training programmes allocate limited attention to this aspect.

According to Stammen *et al.* [2], three factors are important in training the medical specialist to deliver cost-conscious quality care. The first is knowledge transfer in the field of health economics, in terms of patient preferences and scientific evidence. The second is called reflection: reflection and group discussions about decisions taken in the area of cost-effectiveness and preferences of the patient. The third and last factor is a supportive and appreciated environment for trainers, students and role models for the work they undertake on efficiency.

As recognized by the Guideline Development International Network and the European Academy of Neurology, Europe is in need of a training programme that is evidence-based and patient-centred: a training programme that teaches specialists to develop and implement high-quality, evidence-based guidelines and equips them with competences to act more cost-consciously. CoCoCare will be an important step forward to achieve these goals.

Disclosure of conflicts of interest

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he is board member, Guidelines International Network (G-I-N); evidence manager, Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN); employee director, Healthcare Improvement Scotland. None of the other authors declared a conflict of interest.

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