

Standardised operating procedure for updating European Stroke Organisation Guidelines

Authors: D Aguiar de Sousa, TJ Quinn on behalf of the European Stroke Organisation Guideline Board

Version: 2.0 Dec 2023

Background and context:

Promoting the highest quality, evidence-based research across Europe is one of the major priorities of the European Stroke Organisation (ESO). ESO have used clinical practice guidelines as their vehicle to raise standards and ensure consistency in practice.

The evidence base upon which we base our guideline recommendations is constantly evolving. To ensure that the guidance we offer is a valid reflection of the available research and science, requires us to continuously review, and where necessary update, our guideline content.

We are aware of the substantial effort required to produce a high-quality clinical practice guideline. In formulating this approach to updating guidance, our aim was to ensure that guidelines include the most relevant contemporary research while minimising the additional work required of guideline module working groups (MWG).

This standardised operating procedure outlines the approach that we will take to updating ESO guidelines.

Indications for guideline updates:

There are two main scenarios that would warrant a review and potential update to guideline content.

A new study could become available that may warrant a change in guideline recommendation(s). It is expected that MWG chairs, or members, will be aware of any such major publication. This situation would require a prompt review and update. The final product may be in the form of an Expedited Recommendation, although a full guideline update would be the preferred option.

More common would be the situation that sufficient time has passed since the original guideline that an update is warranted. For high profile guidelines, an update should be performed at least within five years of the literature search that informed the previous guideline. In practice this means that updates should be considered at around three years following full publication in the European Stroke Journal. The Chairs of MWGs will decide, based on their knowledge of the available research, on the need for such an update.

Not all ESO guideline content will require an update. Some guidelines may be superseded by other ESO publications. Some topics may no longer be an active area of research and in this instance the guideline will not be updated unless new evidence potentially challenges the recommendations.

As part of the original guideline text, a statement on timing of an update will be added, in the format: 'The recommendations in this guideline will be reviewed, and revised, if necessary, by xx (year)'. The statement is non-binding and decisions on whether an update is required will be made jointly between the guideline board chairs and the chairs of the original MWG.

Process of reviewing and updating guidelines:

The ESO guideline board will keep all guidelines in their portfolio under review as part of their regular meetings. If there is no requirement for an earlier update, at three years following publication the chairs of the original MWG will be contacted to assist with review and update.

The ESO methodologists will update the evidence synthesis from the date of the previous search, using a similar strategy as the original guideline but using a specific filter to keep the search focussed. The resulting list of titles will be reviewed for relevance by the methodologist, and papers that may inform an update will be passed to the MWG chairs for review. The MWG chairs will indicate those papers, if any, they wish to include in an update. The methodologist will then extract data, perform risk of bias and update GRADE tables using the templates and data from the previous guidelines. These materials will be shared with the MWG chairs who will decide if any change to the wording of the evidence-based recommendation or expert consensus statement(s) is required. Any changes will be initiated by the MWG chairs, but the updated text will be shared with the complete MWG for approval.

It is not anticipated that supporting text such as the introduction or discussion will require substantial change and in most cases these sections will be carried through from the previous iteration of the guideline. However, the writing team are free to make alterations to this text as needed. The updated publication will clearly delineate the primary changes from the previous guidelines, with an emphasis on GRADE tables, evidence-based recommendations, and expert consensus statements.

This process assumes that the update retains the PICO questions of the original guideline. There may be a situation that new clinical questions are relevant in atopic area. In this instance, a de novo guideline would be required.

Roles and responsibilities:

The guideline board chairs will contact teams when an update is suggested and support teams in the update process.

The chairs of the original MWG, their delegates, or new substitutes, will select papers to be included in an update, decide if a change to evidence-based recommendation or expert consensus statement is required, create a draft of any updated text. They will also alert ESO if new evidence becomes available that could challenge existing recommendations.

The members of the defined guideline MWG will review and approve any changes to guideline content and can assist with the process of updating if required by the chairs.

The ESO guideline board methodologists will perform a focussed search and, if required by the MWG Chairs, update the extracted data, risk of bias and GRADE tables as required.

Format of guideline update:

For the majority of updates, we will work with the text of the previous guideline, keeping those sections that do not require a change and highlighting the areas that have been modified since the last version. A list of the major changes will be tabulated for ease of reference.

The new document will be titled 'Year XX Update to ESO Guideline xx'.
For example, '2024 Update to the ESO Guideline on Primary Prevention'.

Where new evidence demands a prompt change to the wording of previous guideline, an expedited recommendation can be used.

Updates will be published in European Stroke Journal and archived on the ESO website. A webinar or other presentation can be considered if there are major changes to the guideline content.

If the MWG feel that new PICO questions are required, then a new guideline will be initiated. This will follow the process as outlined in the main ESO Guideline SOP. Some content from the previous guideline can be retained, but the resulting publication would be treated as a new guideline.

The Standardised Operating Procedure (SOP) for ESO Guidelines mandates that there should be a rotation of MWG members for updates. MWG chairs can decide, in consultation with the guideline board, the change to the MWG composition required for the update. Situations that may require consideration would include, but are not limited to, previous members have retired or are no longer active in the area, composition of the previous MWG did not have sufficient diversity or representation, new thought leaders or fellows are available who wish to take an active role in updating content.