

# Practical recommendations for the process of proposing, planning and writing a neurological management guideline by EAN task forces

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The European Academy of Neurology (EAN), founded in 2014 after the merging of the two previously active European Neurological Societies, considers the production of neurological guidelines a major obligation, as this is a major tool to improve clinical practice in neurology. This paper updates practical suggestions to develop guidelines about the treatment and diagnosis of neurological diseases within the framework of the EAN. Its aim is to make uniform, traceable and explicit the path from the decision to write an EAN guideline to its publication. We explain the protocol structure, handling of conflicts of interest, format, timeline and process of revision and acceptance.

It provides the view of the Scientific Committee and the Board of the EAN. We hope to make easier a larger involvement of the EAN scientific community in producing guidelines.

## Introduction

The European Academy of Neurology (EAN) was founded in 2014, after the getting together of the two previously active European Neurological Societies, the European Federation of Neurological Societies (EFNS) and the European Neurological Society (ENS). Since 1997, EFNS has developed a consistent body of guidelines that was published in the *European Journal of Neurology* and collected in two books [1,2]. In the same years, ENS produced several consensus papers that were published in the *Journal of Neurology*. An important aim of the EAN is to establish

guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of neurological disorders and for the organization of certain aspects of neurology. EFNS provided guidance to writing a neurological guideline for diagnosis or treatment in 2001 [3]. This was partly revised in 2004 [4] and underwent a complete revision in 2012 [5] when the GRADE system (Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluation) [6] was adopted. The Scientific Committee (SC) of the EAN coordinates the production of guidelines through its 31 Subspecialty Scientific Panels (SSP) that include the excellence of European scientists in each subspecialty area [7]. The SC has decided to follow the last EFNS guidance for EAN guidelines production, but it deems it necessary to revise the process of proposing, planning, developing and publishing guidelines in order to make it clearer and more transparent.

The aim of this paper is to make uniform, traceable and explicit the path from the decision to write an EAN guideline to its publication. We also aim to provide practical suggestions to the members of EAN

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This is a Continuing Medical Education article, and can be found with corresponding questions on the Internet at <http://www.efns.org/EFNS-Continuing-Medical-Education-online.301.0.html>. Certificates for correctly answering the questions will be issued by the EFNS.

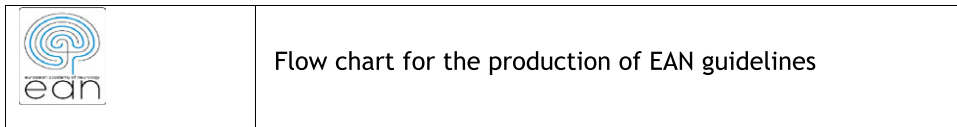
developing guidelines about the treatment and diagnosis of neurological diseases. The paper provides the view of the SC of the EAN and has been discussed and approved by the EAN board.

### Proposing, planning and writing an EAN guideline

The SC together with the SSPs and the EAN board determine on the need for guidelines. The SC will proactively propose a list of guidelines. The EAN SSP or full members of the EAN can submit a proposal for guidelines. EAN guidelines will be produced by *ad hoc* task forces (TFs) appointed by the SC.

The flowchart in Fig. 1 illustrates the whole process. Here we present a point-by-point explanation of the different steps.

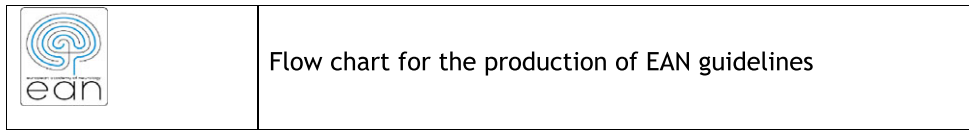
- 1 Either upon request by the SC or due to the initiative of SSPs or individual members of the EAN a TF is created to propose an EAN guideline. The TF will consist of a chairperson and at least six but not usually more than 12 members. No more than two members should usually come from any one country. If feasible, the group should include a patient advocate (normally an officer from a European patient organization) if the TF deals with a clinically relevant topic, and other relevant specialists and health professionals.
- 2 The chair of the TF sends a guideline proposal to the chair of the SC and the EAN President including the title of the proposed guideline, the members of the TF and a brief background illustrating the need for the guideline.
- 3 In the case of acceptance, the TF chair collects the Register of Interests (ROI) of each TF member, including him/herself, and sends them to the Head Office of EAN. The ROI should describe any possible interest connected with the TF member that can or cannot be considered in conflict with the proposed guideline. The ROI form can be found at [www.eaneurology.org/uploads/media/Register\\_of\\_Interests\\_form\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.eaneurology.org/uploads/media/Register_of_Interests_form_Guidelines.pdf). Conflicts of interest (COIs) are declared in the ROI form, including the recipient and amount of money. In the case of interests in conflict with the proposed guideline, the TF chair must explain how the TF will deal with it. For example members who were involved in clinical studies with drugs cannot vote on questions related to those drugs. The SC will consider whether a COI is minor or major and will comment on the ways to deal with it. EAN encourages that no more than half of the TF members have any relevant COI related to the proposed guideline.
- 4 The TF chair submits a protocol for the guideline to the SC. The protocol should include the title, objectives, membership, a short explanation as to why the guideline is needed, already existing guidelines on the same or related topics, search strategy, method for reaching consensus, clinical questions and outcomes, and time frame for accomplishment. Clinical questions must be described in terms of Population, Intervention, Comparator and Outcome (PICO), according to GRADE [8]. A preliminary list and rating of outcome must be considered [8]. The search strategy should include the search string(s). The TF should identify in the protocol which tasks will be undertaken by each member, including those who will search the literature, prepare the evidence tables, grade the evidence and prepare the first draft of the guideline. The TF may apply to the EAN for financial support for the guideline production. In this case the TF must nominate a treasurer and submit an annual account to the EAN Board. The SC will encourage neurological subspecialty organizations to contribute to the guideline TF and even to co-author the guideline.
- 5 The guideline protocol is evaluated by the chair and the members of the SC and is approved or rejected, or a revision may be requested. The SC maintains a Guideline Production Group (GPG) which will comment on the methodological aspects of the guideline protocol. After final approval, and acknowledgement by the EAN board, the TF chair will be mailed the EAN endorsement. A list of the EAN guidelines under preparation will be placed on the EAN website. The TF has 18–24 months to complete the guideline.
- 6 The guideline production will follow the 2012 guidance paper [5]. A checklist ([www.eaneurology.org/uploads/media/EAN\\_checklist.pdf](http://www.eaneurology.org/uploads/media/EAN_checklist.pdf)) including all the steps of the guideline development according to GRADE will be sent to the TF chair at the beginning of the process. The GPG may assist the TF with methodological approach, including use of the GRADE system and the way to reach consensus. It is also responsible for monitoring the entire flow of EAN guidelines.
- 7 The format of the guidelines will be that for the *European Journal of Neurology*, the official journal of the EAN, following a template with these sections:
  - a Title. This should read: EAN Guideline on ... Report of EAN Task Force on ... (title of Task Force, if different from the topic of the guideline)



Please note that the correspondence regarding EAN guidelines should be sent to [scientific@eaneurology.org](mailto:scientific@eaneurology.org)!

Process of guideline production	Responsibility	Description of activity
	TF-chair	It is needed to send an informal request to check if a GI on the respective topic is required.
	SC-chair and President	Review of the guideline proposal.
	TF-chair	Mailing to HO containing completed Rolfs of all TF-members and description of the chair how to deal with it.
	TF-chair	Submission of a TF-protocol.
	GPG SC	Review of the TF-protocol.
	SC-chair board	Decision whether the protocol should be approved. Acknowledgement.
	SC-chair and HO	Mailing to the TF-chair with the official TF-endorsement. New guidelines need to be finished within 18–24 months!
	TF	Guideline production in accordance with the <i>Guidance4GIs</i> .

**Figure 1** Flow chart for the production of EAN guidelines. Rolf, Register of Interests form; EJoN, *European Journal of Neurology*; GI, guideline; GPG, Guideline Production Group; HO, Head Office; SSP, Subspecialty Scientific Panel; SC, Scientific Committee; TF, Task Force; *Guidance4GIs*, ‘Guidance for the preparation of neurological management guidelines by EFNS scientific task forces – revised recommendations 2012’ by M. Leone *et al.* 4



Process of guideline production	Responsibility	Description of activity
	<p><b>1</b></p> <p>TF-chair</p> <p>TF-chair</p> <p>SC</p> <p>SC-chair</p> <p>SC-chair and HO</p> <p>HO</p> <p>SC, EJoN editors, HO</p>	<p>Completion of a check list regarding the progress of the work and the status of the conflict of interest of each TF-member (after 12 months).</p> <p>Submission of the GI document. In addition to the paragraph in the GI the TF has to submit an internal EAN paper regarding the conflict of interest of each TF-member.</p> <p>Review of the GI document by the SC, the GPG, the President, external peer-reviewers &amp; affected SSP-chairs. Editor of EJoN has the right to request anonymous reviewers.</p> <p>Decision on the guideline should be reached within 8 weeks of submission. Chair of SC is moderating this process.</p> <p>Notification of the TF-chair that the GI has been accepted by the SC.</p> <p>Submission of the GI to the EJoN.</p> <p>The GI has been accepted as an official EAN GI &amp; will be published on EAN web &amp; in the EJoN and announced in neuropenews.</p>

Figure 1 continued

b Authors should be listed with name of the chairperson first and the other authors in alphabetical order. The last name may be of a senior

author. A possible alternative is ‘the EAN Task Force on management/diagnosis/other of condition’ in which case a list of members follows

- c Structured abstract containing the main conclusions
  - d Objectives
  - e Background
  - f Search strategy
  - g Method for reaching consensus
  - h Results
  - i Recommendations
  - j Statement of the time when the guideline will probably need to be updated
  - k Conflicts of interest
  - l Role of each member of the TF
  - m References
  - n Online material (e.g. summary of findings tables)
- 8 The length of the guideline report should be considered. Whilst an ideal length is up to 6000 words, it must be acknowledged that many guidelines deal with a number of questions and therefore need more space. In view of publication in the *European Journal of Neurology* additional files can be submitted for online only publication. Also supplementary material may be published on the EAN website.
  - 9 In order to maintain a regular flow of guidelines and to ensure transparency, the GPG will request the TF chair to send an update on the progress of the work by filling the checklist 12 months after the onset of the work. The TF chair will also be requested to update on any new COI by him/her or the TF members at the completion of the guideline.
  - 10 The TF will submit the completed guideline for approval to the chairperson of the SC, accompanied by a final update of the COIs, if any. The SC will have the proposed guideline reviewed by its members, the GPG, the President of the EAN, and the chairpersons of any SSP that might be affected by the guideline, although not involved in its preparation. External peer reviewing may be sought from content and methodological European and non-European experts. The Editor in Chief of the *European Journal of Neurology* (who is an *ex officio* member of the SC) has the right to ask for further anonymous review.
  - 11 Within 8 weeks from submission, the chairperson of the SC will notify the chairperson of the TF if the guideline has been accepted as official guideline of the EAN or not. If revision is needed, the TF will prepare a revised version and submit this to the review process again, highlighting the revisions and documenting the responses to each of the referees' comments. Guidelines where the quality level does not qualify for EAN guidelines could be considered as an EAN consensus review.
  - 12 Guidelines will be published in the *European Journal of Neurology* and on the EAN website ([www.eaneurology.org](http://www.eaneurology.org)). The editor of the Journal may make minor editorial changes. Under exceptional circumstances, the EAN will allow simultaneous publication in the *European Journal of Neurology* and in the journal of the collaborating organization of the guideline produced in agreement with other scientific societies, provided that advanced permission is sought prior to preparation of the guideline. Under such circumstances the guideline must be published simultaneously in the two journals.
  - 13 Any new guideline will be announced in NeuroNews [9], the blog of the EAN. EAN members will be allowed to publish comments online.
  - 14 National societies are encouraged to translate guidelines for dissemination in their own countries. Guidelines may be translated and published in local language journals. These translations have to refer to and to explain deviations from the original guideline, if any. Permission for translation must be sought from the EAN and Wiley, the publisher of the *European Journal of Neurology*. Translation must be checked and approved by the EAN Board.
  - 15 The SC will regularly survey the validity of published guidelines and will ask for revision every 5 years or less if deemed necessary.

## Conclusions

This paper has been written to explain the production process of EAN guidelines. It mainly refers to the previous guidance [5], but introduces some novelties: the process of guideline proposal, the involvement of the SC in the early phase of proposal submission, the protocol structure, and the handling of COIs including their possible modifications during the whole process are better explained, the timeline of the production process is defined in more detail, a larger involvement of the EAN scientific community is searched.

The EAN considers the creation of guidelines a major obligation because this is a major tool to improve clinical practice in neurology.

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### Disclosure of conflicts of interest

Drs Leone, Keindl, Schapira, Deuschl, Federico have no conflict of interest related to this paper.

### Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

**Data S1.** EAN guideline flow checklist.

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