

Using protocols, standards, policies and guidelines to enhance confidence and career development

In general, nurses appear to be much more compliant than doctors at working with protocols. Protocols provide a clear logical structure and therefore added confidence for clinical management. In order to create the most pertinent protocols and guidelines for your practice consider engaging the whole team to create your own set – you will then know that these are appropriate and easy to follow.

The following publication gives clear guidance on how to write protocols and guidelines – Broughton R and Rathbone B. What makes a good clinical guideline? *Evidence Based Medicine* 2001; 1 (11).

The terminology for protocols, guidelines and standards is often used interchangeably. However, these are all different and to use them effectively you need to be clear about the definitions (see table below).

Terms and definitions	
Term	Definition
Protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none">An agreed framework outlining the care that will be provided to patients in a designated area of practice. They do not describe how a procedure is performed, but why, where, when and by whom the care is given
Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A statement, reached through consensus, which clearly identifies the desired outcome. Usually used within audit as a measure of success
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A formal written statement detailing the particular action to be taken in a particular situation that is contractually binding
Guideline	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Systematically derived statements that help practitioners to make decisions about care in specific clinical circumstances. These should be research or evidence based

Examples of national guidelines that provide robust evidence for clinical management

- National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) – www.nice.org.uk
- Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) – www.sign.ac.uk
- www.eguidelines.co.uk
- Centre for reviews and dissemination – www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd

Advantages of using protocols

- Framework for a complex, specialised sequence of activities.
- Provides increased autonomy with a focus to shape future work.
- Ensures consensus within the primary care team.
- Legal protection.
- Identifies training needs.
- May facilitate change.

Disadvantages of using protocols

- Stifles individual care management.
- May reduce need for qualified staff.
- Require regular review.
- Compliance may be problematic.
- Restricts clinical discretion.

What constitutes a good protocol?

- *Clearly documented lines of accountability.*
- *Specific referral criteria.*
- *Clarity.*
- *Brevity.*
- *Fit with professional guidelines.*