A physician draws on his or her knowledge and best judgment in determining how to care for a patient. However, some of what is learned in medical school is out of date well before a physician’s career is over. New medications, diagnostic procedures, and surgical techniques are being developed at a rapid pace. For this reason, a health professional must keep up with new knowledge and new practices that are found to be more effective than the old ones—not only for the patient’s sake but for the legal protection of the physician, as well. Malpractice suits can be based on failure to diagnose or failure to properly treat according to what was known and considered standard practice at the time. The medical literature is published at such a great rate and so voluminously that no one can keep up with all the current literature. A particular clinical problem sometimes prompts a physician to seek guidelines. The ability to find scientific evidence of the best current practice is a lifelong-learning skill. The philosophy and practice of evidence-based medicine constitutes a whole course unto itself and cannot be properly dealt with here. Briefly described, it 1) begins with a clinical problem which is formed into a question. 2) The answer is then sought in the professional literature which must be 3) critically appraised as to its validity. The information gleaned from this process is 4) applied to the clinical problem and then 5) evaluated as to its effectiveness for the patient. For now, we will “keep it simple” and provide sources of information which have already been professionally reviewed and which assist with step 2) and to a certain extent with step 3).

**Practice Guidelines** - Systematically developed statements to assist practitioner and patient decisions about appropriate health care for specific clinical circumstances...; may be developed by government agencies, institutions, organizations such as professional societies or governing boards, or by the convening of expert panels.*

**Systematic Review** - A critical assessment and evaluation of research (not simply a summary) that attempts to address a focused clinical question using methods designed to reduce the likelihood of bias.*

**Sources of Practice Guidelines**

This site provides clinical information categories such as: evidence-based practice, outcomes and effectiveness, technology assessment, preventive services, and clinical practice guidelines.

**CDC Recommends...Prevention Guidelines System** - [http://www.phppo.cdc.gov/cdcRecommends](http://www.phppo.cdc.gov/cdcRecommends)
This site gives the most current CDC recommendations and guidelines for the prevention, control, treatment and detection of infectious and chronic diseases, environmental hazards, natural or human-generated disasters, occupational diseases and injuries, intentional and unintentional injuries and disabilities and other public health conditions.

**Health Services/Technology Assessment Text (HSTAT)** -
HSTAT provides access to full-text documents useful for providing health information and for health care decision making. These publications include clinical practice guidelines, quick-reference guides for clinicians, protocols, consumer health brochures, evidence reports and technology assessments produced by a variety of government agencies.

**Clinical Guidelines (Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement)** –
Clinical guidelines for preventative services and disease management developed by ICSI, an independent nonprofit collaboration of health care organizations.
The library has some practice guidelines in its book collection. They may be located by searching the catalog for “practice guidelines” and “your topic.” For example, perform a “WORDS in titles, series, subjects and notes” search and type the following: practice guidelines and asthma. (See the handout on Innopac if you need help using the online catalog.)

MDConsult is an electronic resource with a number of useful full-text components. One of these components is a collection of peer-reviewed practice guidelines which are located in the Current Practice tab. You may browse by authoring organizations, specialty, or topic as well as by entering your own search topic. (See the handout on MDConsult if you need help using this resource.)

MEDLINE – http://lib.sh.lsuhsc.edu/databases/databases.php Select Ovid or PubMed from Databases menu
Ovid - user ID and password (See the Ovid handout, if you need help.)
PubMed - (See the PubMed handout, if you need help.)
A number of practice guidelines are published in journal articles. These may be identified by searching MEDLINE with “your topic” and selecting the publication type “practice guideline.” For example, type asthma/ and limit retrieval to the publication type “practice guideline.”

The National Guideline Clearinghouse™ (NGC) is a comprehensive database of evidence-based clinical practice guidelines and related documents produced by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) in partnership with the American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Association of Health Plans (AAHP). It provides summaries of guidelines and links to full text of guidelines where available. Further, it allows the user to create a chart of selected guidelines for purpose of comparison.

SOURCES OF SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS


Bandolier - http://www.jr2.ox.ac.uk/bandolier/index.html

Cochrane Library - http://lib-sh.lsuhsc.edu/menu.html - select Cochrane from database menu - IP validated

MEDLINE - http://lib.sh.lsuhsc.edu/databases/databases.php Select Ovid or PubMed from Databases menu
See access requirements for each platform at earlier entry for MEDLINE
Search for your topic combined with the text words “systematic review.” Also, look for your topic with the publication types meta-analysis or randomized controlled trial. PubMed features a filter to limit retrieval to systematic reviews. When in PubMed, click on “Clinical Queries” on the left side of the screen, then select “Find Systematic Reviews” and type in your topic.

SUMSearch - http://sumsearch.uthscsa.edu/
A meta-search engine that gathers evidence-based clinical information from MEDLINE, DARE and the National Guidelines Clearinghouse.

TRIP Database - http://www.tripdatabase.com/
The books listed below discuss evidence-based medicine and how to evaluate the literature.