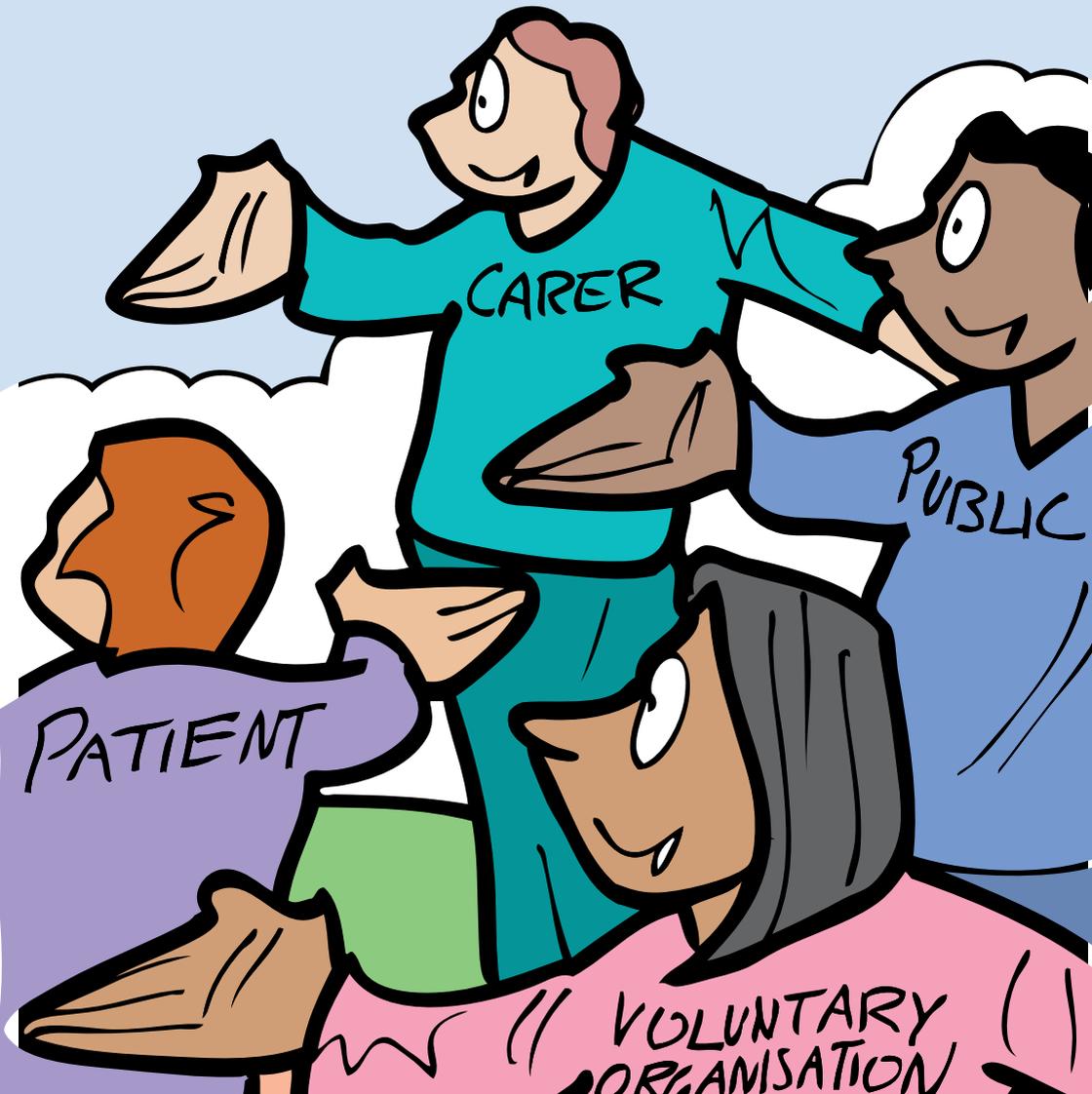


# SIGN GUIDELINES

*Information for patients, carers  
and members of the public*





Corporate member of  
Plain English Campaign  
Committed to clearer communication.

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# Background

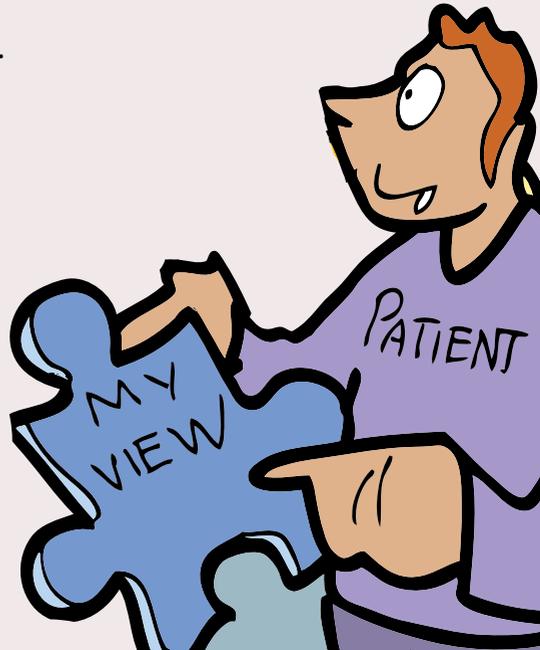
## Who are we and what do we do?

The Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN), writes guidelines which give advice to people who work in the health service (for example, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, dentists and occupational therapists) and patients about the best treatments that are available. We write them by working with doctors, nurses and other NHS staff, and with patients, carers and members of the public. The guidelines are based on the most up-to-date medical evidence.

## What are SIGN guidelines for?

We write guidelines to:

- ★ help NHS staff and patients understand medical evidence and use it to make decisions about health care;
- ★ make sure patients get the best care available, no matter where they live; and
- ★ improve health care across Scotland.





## Who decides which guidelines SIGN should write?

Anyone in Scotland can suggest a topic for a guideline to us. This includes NHS staff, voluntary organisations, charities, patients and carers.

To suggest a guideline topic please fill in our topic proposal form. You can get this from our website at [www.sign.ac.uk/about/proposal](http://www.sign.ac.uk/about/proposal), or you can contact the SIGN Executive, Gyle Square, 1 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9EB, Telephone 0131 623 4720.

We choose a topic if we know that different hospitals in different areas offer different tests and treatments for the same condition.

We also select particular topics if we know some treatments could reduce levels of disease or death rates associated with conditions.

We want to make sure that everyone in Scotland receives the best health care, so our guidelines recommend the best proven treatments.

# Who is involved in developing guidelines?

To develop a SIGN guideline, we bring together a group of people from across Scotland. The group includes:

- ★ NHS staff, for example, doctors, nurses, general practitioners, and physiotherapists
- ★ patient and carers
- ★ members from the voluntary sector and
- ★ public representatives.

# What is a SIGN guideline based on?

Our guidelines are based on medical and scientific research.

Guideline group members read research papers to find evidence for the best ways to diagnose, treat and care for patients.

If no research has been done, the group members use their clinical experience and judgement to suggest treatments.



# How are the concerns of patients and carers identified?

We always have patient and carer representatives on guideline groups. We also involve the public in our work by:

- ★ writing to patient organisations and charities to ask them what they think our guideline should cover;
- ★ writing to NHS organisations to ask if any local research on patients' and carers' views has been done;
- ★ looking at the research literature on patients' and carers' experiences and preferences; and
- ★ getting direct feedback from patients and carers, for example, we may hold focus groups with service users.

We involve patients and carers in the development of guidelines so their views and concerns add to the knowledge and experience of health care staff.



# How will SIGN know that the guideline has covered all of the important areas?

Every guideline we develop is checked carefully before it is published. When we have a draft version of the guideline we ask NHS staff and patients and carers to review it for us.

Our consultation processes include the following:

## ★ National open meetings

At a one day conference, the guideline group discuss the draft guideline with other doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, general practitioners and other NHS staff, and ask for feedback. We invite patients and carers to the national open meeting so that they can comment on the draft guideline and make sure that the issues that matter to patients and carers have been included.

Based on this feedback, the guideline will be updated before going to the next stage of consultation, which is peer review.

## ★ Peer review

All our guidelines are independently reviewed by an expert panel before they are published. We ask reviewers to comment on the accuracy of the guideline and to suggest improvements. The draft guideline is also sent to lay reviewers to make sure that the guideline has considered issues that are important to patients and carers.

You can read more about lay reviewing a SIGN guideline in our leaflet [Reviewing a draft SIGN guideline: information for lay reviewers](#) or by visiting our website at [www.sign.ac.uk/patients/network.html](http://www.sign.ac.uk/patients/network.html)

## What happens next?

Prior to publication, the guideline and a summary of peer reviewers' comments are reviewed by the SIGN editorial group. This ensures each reviewer's comments have been addressed adequately.

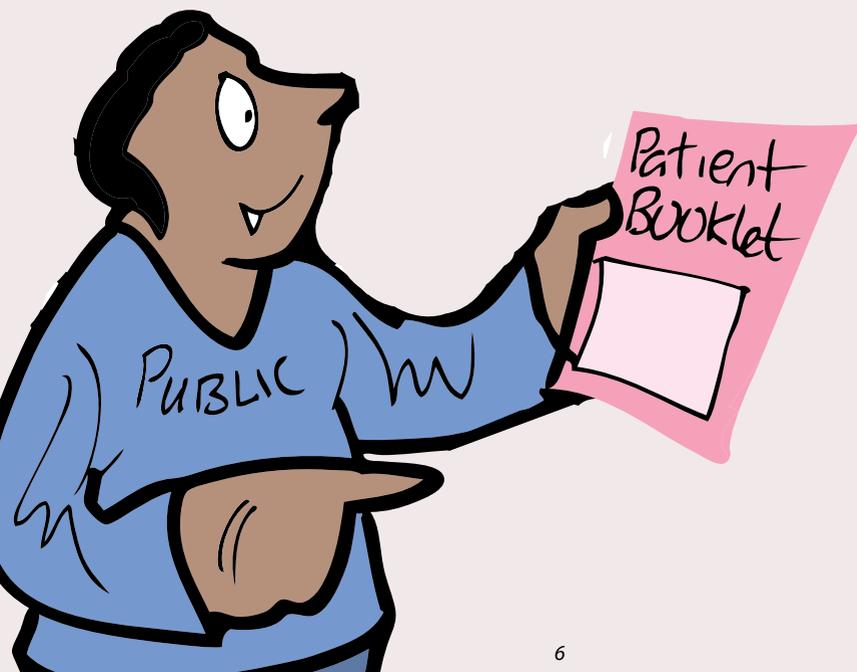
Once the guideline has been checked, it is published and given to all relevant NHS staff in Scotland. The guidelines can also be downloaded free of charge from our website at [www.sign.ac.uk](http://www.sign.ac.uk)

## Further reading

**Patient involvement in SIGN guidelines**

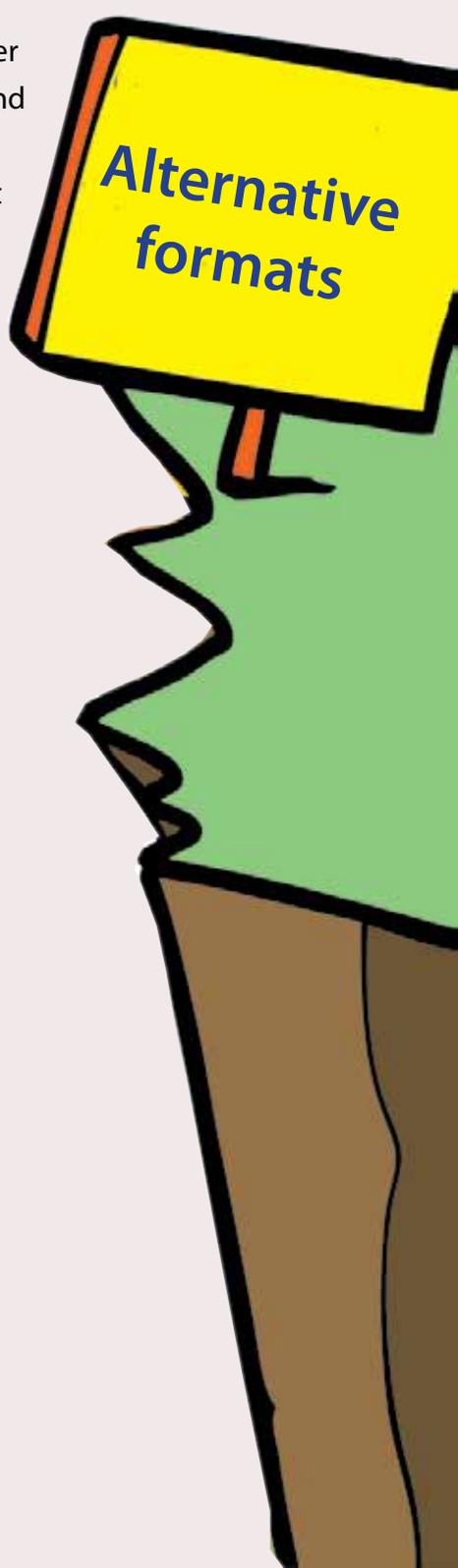
**Reviewing a draft SIGN guideline: information for lay reviewers**

You can download these leaflets from our website [www.sign.ac.uk/patients/network.html](http://www.sign.ac.uk/patients/network.html) or phone 0131 623 4720 to order hard copies.



If you would like a copy of this leaflet in another language or format such as large print, or to find out more about SIGN guidelines and how the public are involved in our work, please contact Karen Graham, Patient Involvement Officer, on 0131 623 4740 or email her at

[karen.graham2@nhs.net](mailto:karen.graham2@nhs.net)



# Notes

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