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Title

**"Analysis of the Policies of Iran's Clinical Practice Guidelines and
Presentation of Policy Options"**

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Abstract

Background and objectives: Clinical practice guidelines are crucial tools for standardizing care processes and improving the quality of health services. These guidelines are developed based on the best available scientific evidence to assist healthcare providers and recipients in making informed decisions regarding clinical interventions, public health practices, and policymaking. Despite extensive efforts in producing these guidelines, fundamental challenges such as high costs, poor quality of services, and unwarranted variations in treatment methods persist. Cultural, social, economic, and organizational differences across countries are among the most significant factors influencing the varying content and implementability of these guidelines.

In Iran, despite the development of a considerable number of clinical practice guidelines, numerous obstacles, including unfavorable economic conditions, unsuitable organizational and social environments, have hindered their complete implementation. Given the importance of widespread implementation of these guidelines in optimizing resource management and controlling healthcare costs, a thorough study and analysis of relevant policies, strategies, challenges, and obstacles within the country is deemed essential. To this end, this research aims to identify, study, and critically analyze the policies, strategies, challenges, and barriers surrounding the clinical practice guidelines program in Iran, employing a policy analysis approach. After assessing the current situation, a clear path will be designed and proposed to evaluate optimal and feasible policy options to improve the existing state.

Methods: This research employed a qualitative multi-method approach comprising two main phases. In the first phase, the identification and analysis of clinical practice guidelines policies in Iran were conducted using three methods: literature review, semi-structured

interviews, and framework analysis based on the policy triangle. The document review and interviews with key stakeholders at national and provincial levels provided the necessary data, and the framework analysis was performed across the dimensions of content, context, process, and actors.

In the second phase, potential policy options were identified, and the most feasible and implementable options were selected through a comparative review of leading countries' experiences in this domain and the convening of an expert panel. This two-stage approach enabled the identification and selection of evidence-based policy options by collecting diverse data, engaging stakeholders, and integrating findings. The literature review laid the theoretical groundwork and examined the background of the topic. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants and experts in the field to gather their perspectives and practical experiences regarding clinical practice guidelines policies and existing challenges. Finally, an expert panel comprising specialists and professionals was convened, providing an opportunity for interaction, discussion, and exchange of views on the findings from previous stages and the presentation of policy options.

Results: This study analyzed the context surrounding the formation of clinical practice guideline policies in Iran. The Walt and Gilson's policy analysis framework, comprising situational, structural, external/international, and cultural factors, was used to categorize the contextual factors. Additionally, a legal and operational factors category was added to the framework.

Numerous factors were identified within each category. The most significant ones include the perceived domestic need, sanctions, stakeholders' financial interests, differences in regional structures, the government's stance, the complexity of the healthcare market, poor adherence to professional ethics, the influence of international organizations, and the need for legal and operational infrastructure.

The main objectives of the clinical practice guideline policies were to integrate healthcare delivery, enable strategic purchasing of services, enhance staff education and knowledge, improve quality and equitable access to services, reduce induced demand, and oversee processes and control costs. The key stakeholders can be categorized into supporters (government agencies and insurance organizations) and opponents (healthcare providers and the private sector). The policymaking process involved four main stages: agenda-setting, policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation, each with its own set of challenges.

The identified contextual challenges included a lack of necessary legal and operational infrastructure, conflicting interests among different stakeholder groups, differences in regional structures and conditions, and political instability. Challenges related to policy content encompassed inadequate consideration of the realities of the healthcare system structure, issues with insurance coverage for certain services, and a lack of strategic purchasing of services according to standards. Process-related challenges included the absence of appropriate cultural, legal, and operational infrastructure, lack of stakeholder participation, and lack of necessary monitoring and evaluation processes. Stakeholder-related challenges involved conflicts of interest among different groups, lack of mutual acceptance and trust, and improper exercise of power. To address these challenges, recommendations were made, such as adapting the

guidelines to local and regional conditions, considering the interests of all stakeholders and avoiding conflicts, designing and developing monitoring and evaluation systems, enhancing the scientific rigor of the guideline development process, establishing legal support for implementation, and providing necessary operational and educational infrastructure.

Specific policy options for contextual factors included localizing the guidelines to align with regional conditions and cultural preferences of service recipients. For stakeholders, recommendations included considering the interests of all stakeholder groups, preventing conflicts of interest, using the guidelines as a basis for strategic purchasing of services, and efforts toward integrating service delivery nationwide. Other suggested options involved designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation policies, enhancing the scientific quality and standardization of the guideline development process, establishing legal support for guideline implementation, providing necessary operational and educational infrastructure, and employing effective educational methods to improve staff and provider attitudes and awareness.

Cunclusion : Clinical practice guidelines play a crucial role in improving the quality of healthcare and standardizing treatment methods. However, the successful implementation of these guidelines faces several challenges. The lack of political stability, weak stewardship in establishing legal and operational guarantees, and inadequate attention to necessary hardware and software infrastructure have led to the incomplete implementation of these guidelines. Furthermore, the lack of flexibility in localizing the guidelines and disregarding infrastructural and cultural differences poses additional challenges.

The top-down approach to these policies has caused them to deviate from real-world conditions in some cases. The absence of feedback mechanisms, lack of formal and periodic

monitoring and evaluation, and the lack of representation from all target groups in the development and evaluation processes are further obstacles to the successful implementation of these guidelines.

For the successful implementation of clinical practice guidelines, simultaneous attention to scientific content and operational aspects is essential. Active stakeholder participation, guideline review, establishment of necessary infrastructure, formal monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and the opportunity for periodic feedback and revision can ensure the successful implementation of these guidelines.

Keywords : Clinical practice guideline, Evidence base medicine, Policy analysis.