

Making the GRADE



McMaster University, particularly the CE&B Department, has played a critical role in developing methods to synthesize the best evidence to inform health care decisions. Now the University is playing a critical role in another major innovation.

It's called GRADE – the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation. Conceived in 2000, it does more than provide concise summaries of the best evidence available.

It lays out a systematic and explicit approach that can be used to weigh the quality, strength and relevance of evidence, and help clinicians make decisions that are in people's best interests.

According to CE&B Chair Holger Schünemann, who coined the term "GRADE", it also recognizes that

harms are unavoidable when making the best choices about health care.

"Any decision comes with desirable and undesirable consequences," he argues. "Patient values and preferences, equity, feasibility and acceptability are all important factors, and their importance varies from patient to patient. The physicians' Hippocratic Oath 'first do no harm' needs revision to say 'first do no net harm.'"

Schünemann is one of two chairs of the 300-plus-member international GRADE Working Group, initiated by another CE&B graduate, Andrew Oxman, that is reshaping health practice the world over. More than 90 organizations, including the World Health Organization, the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care, the U.K.'s National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, and the

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, have used GRADE to develop thousands of recommendations and guidelines for conditions, from allergic diseases to cervical cancer to multi-drug resistant tuberculosis.

McMaster's GRADE Centre, directed by Schünemann and now replicated on four continents, has become a lead source for

guidance in the use of GRADE methodology for governments, NGOs and health organizations around the globe. With a €3.8 million European project almost complete, scientists are also improving the way research information is communicated to patients, clinicians and policymakers. GRADE's philosophy is simple, says Schünemann: "Evidence is worth nothing until we know what it is worth."

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