

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Using the Appraisal of Guidelines for Research and Evaluation II to Assess Clinical Practice Guidelines

In a 2007 column that I wrote with MaryJo Vetter (Levin & Vetter, 2007), we took readers through the process of assessing a clinical practice guideline (CPG) for dementia using the Appraisal of Guidelines for Research and Evaluation (AGREE) instrument. At the time, we had to print/develop our own appraisal tool and calculate scores for each domain by hand. Although this process required a lot of work on the part of evaluators and several hours for workshops on how to use this critical appraisal tool, all those who participated in workshops with me on how to assess CPG's with this tool found this method of guideline assessment relevant and useful. I find it difficult to believe that it has been 6 years since that column. Fortunately for us, the AGREE Trust (<http://www.agreetrust.org/>) developed AGREE II. Not only has the "Rigour of Development" domain been enhanced, but the entire process of guideline evaluation can now also be conducted online. This column will focus on these exceptional and useful refinements and is coauthored by a mentee of mine, Lorraine Ferrara, who has worked with me side by side to introduce the AGREE II and the process of guideline evaluation to our clinical colleagues at the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY).

Before proceeding with the practical hints for using this amazing new tool, I wish to share with you how the tool has been refined. First, the 4-point Likert-type scale on the original tool has been replaced with a 7-point scale. Next, modifications, additions, and deletions have been made to approximately half of the original core items. One major change is the addition of NEW Item 9: "The strengths and limitations of the body of evidence are clearly described" (The AGREE Next Steps Consortium, 2009, p. 2). The last change is that the new AGREE II tool includes a newly restructured user's manual. The manual is part of the complete AGREE tool document and includes information and guidance for completing each of the items.

PRACTICAL HINTS

First, go to the AGREE Trust Web site <http://www.agreetrust.org/>. Next, create a user ID and password for yourself by clicking on “Register here” (see Figure 1, number 1). There is no charge for this. (That in itself is amazing in this day and age.) Next, download the *AGREE II PDF* (Figure 1, number 2). Before reading the AGREE II, you may want to familiarize yourself with the tool first by viewing the *AGREE II Overview Tutorial*, an avatar-guided tutorial that takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. The tutorial provides an overview of the AGREE II and how to use this tool. To view the tutorial, click on “AGREE II Online Training Tools” (Figure 1, number 3) and launch the previously mentioned tutorial. This tutorial is one of two training tools that help users apply the AGREE II to the evaluation of CPG’s. These tools are currently being evaluated in a randomized trial.

Once you have digested the process from viewing the tutorial and reading about the tool and how to use it, go to the second tool, the *AGREE II Practice Exercise* (see Figure 2). This new development allows you to rate a sample practice guideline that experts have reviewed and appraised and then compare your score with theirs, a totally online experience. During the last workshop that Lorraine Ferrara and I conducted with nurses from the VNSNY, we used this process. Each participant had a computer and rated the practice guideline during the workshop (although they were asked to read it prior to the workshop). Afterwards, we discussed only those items for which participants differed more than one or two points from the experts’ opinions. We received very positive feedback on using this new process to evaluate clinical practice guidelines.

The screenshot shows the AGREE II home page. At the top left is the AGREE logo with the tagline "Advancing the science of practice guidelines". To the right is a search bar and a "Login" link. Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for Home, About, Resource Centre, Research Projects, News, Forum, and My AGREE. The main content area is titled "Welcome to the AGREE Enterprise website" and includes a sub-header "The official place for all things AGREE". There are three main columns of content: "The Appraisal of Guidelines for Research and Evaluation (AGREE) Instrument", "The original AGREE Instrument has been updated and methodologically refined", and "Resource Centre". A central logo for "AGREE II" is also present. On the right side, there are three boxes: "Download AGREE II PDF" (circled with a '2'), "Appraise guidelines online" (containing links for "Use 'My AGREE'", "First time Users can Register here" (circled with a '1'), and "Returning Users Log in here"), and "Quick links" (containing links for "Introduction to the AGREE website", "AGREE II Online Training Tools" (circled with a '3'), and "Start appraising practice guidelines"). At the bottom, there is a footer with "Help Disclaimer Copyright Privacy Policy Contact us" and "Designed and managed by Minervation".

Figure 1. Appraisal of Guidelines for Research and Evaluation (AGREE) II home page.

AGREE II Training Tools

AGREE II Translations

AGREE-related publications

Practice Guidelines

AGREE II

The Original AGREE Instrument

AGREE Enterprise website > Resource Centre > Training > Introduction

AGREE II Training Tools

The AGREE A3 Research Team has developed two training tools to assist AGREE II users to effectively apply the tool. The tools are currently being evaluated in a randomized research study.

AGREE II Publications

Browse our library of publications related to AGREE

Download AGREE II

Download the latest AGREE tool as a PDF

AGREE II Overview Tutorial

Launch the tutorial

This tool provides an Avatar-guided overview of the AGREE II tool. This tool takes approximately 10 minutes to complete.

It will open in a new browser tab when you click the link.

AGREE II Tutorial + Practice Exercise

Launch the exercise

Expanding upon the Avatar-guided tutorial, the "Practice Exercise" tool provides trainees with the opportunity to appraise a test practice guideline with the AGREE II, upon submitting their ratings, the training tool system provides immediate feedback to how the trainees responses compares with those of expert ratings.

Figure 2. Appraisal of Guidelines for Research and Evaluation (AGREE) II training tools.

Important to note is that not every guideline you may be interested in appraising has experts who have already weighed in on it. But, once you have practiced with the guideline that is on the Web site, you are ready to venture into your own appraisals with your colleagues. This Web site also allows you and your colleagues to appraise the same guidelines, save your ratings, and then display all your team's appraisal scores. You and your colleagues may then meet to discuss agreements and discrepancies, and then "agree" (pun intended) on the recommendations you would make for using any of the appraised guideline recommendations in your own or your agency's protocols for clinical practice.

REFERENCES

- The AGREE Next Steps Consortium. (2009). *Appraisal of guidelines for research & evaluation II*. Ontario, CA: The AGREE Research Trust.
- Levin, R. F., & Vetter, M. (2007). Evidence-based practice: A guide to negotiate the clinical practice guideline maze. *Research and Theory for Nursing Practice*, 21(1), 5–9.

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