



Management of acute undifferentiated abdominal pain

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Requestors: Management of Abdominal Pain Working Party
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Abstract

- Background:** There is controversy over the most appropriate management of adult patients presenting to the Emergency Department with acute undifferentiated abdominal pain. The Management of Abdominal Pain Working Party is aiming to develop evidence-based clinical practice guidelines to support clinical staff in Southern Health working with this patient group. The Working Party asked CCE to determine whether there were any existing evidence-based guidelines addressing this area.
- Clinical Question:** Are there any existing high-quality, evidence-based guidelines to support clinical practice in management of adult patients presenting to the Emergency Department with acute undifferentiated abdominal pain?
- Methods:** We included guidelines published in English.
We searched national and international guideline databases, Medline, CINAHL, EMBASE, and the internet using Google.
Guidelines were selected and appraised by one reviewer in consultation with colleagues, using inclusion, exclusion and appraisal criteria established a priori.
- Results:** We did not identify any relevant, high-quality, evidence-based guidelines. Two guidelines were considered potentially relevant but were excluded because the methods used to identify research evidence and develop recommendations were not demonstrated to be rigorous.
- Conclusions:** We were unable to identify any high-quality, evidence-based guidelines to support clinical practice in management of adult patients presenting to the Emergency Department with acute undifferentiated abdominal pain. We did find several resources on management of acute abdominal pain that may be of interest to the Working Party.

Background

There is controversy over the most appropriate management of adult patients presenting to the Emergency Department with acute undifferentiated abdominal pain, particularly for those patients over 60 years of age.

The Southern Health Management of Abdominal Pain Working Party is aiming to develop evidence-based clinical practice guidelines to support clinicians in Southern Health Emergency Departments working with this patient group. The Working Party asked CCE to determine whether there were any existing evidence-based guidelines addressing this area.

Clinical Question

Are there any existing high-quality, evidence-based guidelines to support clinical practice in management of adult patients presenting to the Emergency Department with acute undifferentiated abdominal pain?

Methods

Guideline Selection Criteria

Patient	Adult patients presenting to the Emergency Department with acute undifferentiated abdominal pain.				
Clinicians	Senior and junior clinical staff.				
Context	Emergency services in hospital settings comparable to Australia.				
Interventions	Diagnostic and therapeutic approaches.				
Study Type	Any evidence-based guideline (meeting AGREE* criteria 8 and 12).	Publication Date	Since 1980	Language	English

* See www.agreecollaboration.org

Search Strategy

Evidence Source	URL	Date of Search
Guidelines International Network Database	www.g-i-n.net	December 4 th , 2008
National Guideline Clearinghouse	www.guidelines.gov	December 4 th , 2008
National Health and Medical Research Council	www.nhmrc.gov.au	December 4 th , 2008
National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence	www.nice.org.uk	December 4 th , 2008
New Zealand Guidelines Group	www.nzgg.org.nz	December 4 th , 2008
Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network	www.sign.ac.uk	December 4 th , 2008
Medline (Ovid) (1950 to 18 December 2008)		December 18 th , 2008
CINAHL (Ovid) (1982 to December Week 2 2008)		December 18 th , 2008
EMBASE (1980 to Week 50, 2008)		December 18 th , 2008
The internet, using Google	www.google.com	January 1 st , 2009

References in articles were checked to see if they referred to relevant guidelines. Guidelines from professional colleges and associations were checked online for any updated versions.

Search Terms in Medline*

Patient	Medline: Exp(guideline/ OR guidelines as topic/ OR clinical protocols/ OR health planning guidelines/) OR (guideline* OR protocol* OR practice parameter*).mp AND Exp Abdominal pain/ OR Abdomen, acute/ OR ((Exp abdomen/ OR Exp(abdominal abscess/ OR abdominal injuries/ or peritonitis/) OR abdom*.mp) AND (pain.mp or pain/))
Clinicians	-
Context	-

Data Collection & Analysis

Guidelines were selected and appraised by two reviewers in consultation with colleagues using selection and appraisal criteria established *a priori*.

Relevant guidelines, meeting AGREE criteria 8 and 12, were appraised by two reviewers using the AGREE tool.

Results

There were no relevant high-quality, evidence-based guidelines found in the guideline websites or databases. The search of the combined Medline, CINAHL, and EMBASE databases returned 3284 references. The Google search resulted in 3,640,000 sites, with 372 sites of primary relevance as determined by Google. After excluding references with irrelevant populations (e.g. neonates) and topics (e.g. *in vitro* studies), there were 2912 references. Upon further inspection of titles and abstracts, there were 245 references that were in the relevant population, and referred to abdominal pain.

There were no references that were high-quality, evidence-based guidelines, fulfilling AGREE criteria 8 and 12.

Discussion

There appears to be a lack of relevant high-quality, evidence-based guidelines to support clinical practice in the management of adult patients presenting to the Emergency Department with acute undifferentiated abdominal pain.

In the absence of high-quality, evidence-based guidelines, we did identify two resources which may provide useful background information. We emphasise that these documents should not be used to direct practice because we have concerns about their development methods.

We identified a potentially relevant clinical policy document by the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) on evaluating patients with acute abdominal pain which was published in 2000¹. However, this document was excluded because it does not provide a systematic description of the search for evidence, and does not always give explicit links between the recommendations and the supporting evidence. This ACEP clinical policy expands on the 1994 clinical policy on diagnosing and managing abdominal pain by ACEP which was much broader in scope².

Also potentially relevant are the Appropriateness Criteria® documents, a series of documents by the American College of Radiologists that give recommendations as to which imaging tool should be used for different presentations of abdominal pain³⁻⁹. These are consensus-based documents with recommendations based on clinical expertise and experience, as well as the scientific literature. However the methods used for searching the literature are not available and other aspects of the methods used to develop these documents are unclear.

There are also several other related resources that may be of interest that investigate or evaluate diagnostic algorithms or tools for acute abdominal pain:

- A report of an observational study aimed at deriving a clinical guideline for assessment of nonspecific abdominal pain based on the analysis of patient data (GAPEDS)¹⁰.
- Electronic decision support software such as *AAPHelp* which is an electronic decision support program based on over 50,000 cases, over 15 years, from over 100 hospitals in the UK and Europe¹¹.
- An UK Health Technology Assessment report that systematically reviewed clinical decision tools for use in acute abdominal pain was also found¹².

Conclusions

We were unable to identify any existing high-quality, evidence-based guidelines to support clinical practice in management of adult patients presenting to the Emergency Department with acute undifferentiated abdominal pain. We did find several resources on management of acute abdominal pain that may be of interest to the Working Party.

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