ESGVM operating procedure for writing of veterinary practice guidelines

1 Purpose

Inappropriate prescribing and use of antimicrobials in veterinary medicine contribute to the development of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). The Study Group for Veterinary Microbiology (ESGVM) within the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID) actively supports development and publication of evidence-based veterinary practice guidelines to promote best practices for diagnosis, management, prevention and therapy of key infectious diseases in veterinary medicine.

The aim of the present document is to describe the Operating Procedure (OP) that will be used by the drafting group (DG) chairs and members for guideline development.

2 Election of topics and commissioning of guidelines

The ESGVM Guideline Core Group (EGCG) is responsible for commissioning guidelines and managing the portfolio. Topics for guidelines can be proposed by any member of the ESGVM or arise directly from the EGCG.

The ESGVM guidelines target antimicrobial use in food producing animals as well as non-food producing animals such as companion animal species. Criteria for adopting proposals are: a) the amount and critical importance of antimicrobials used for treatment of the disease condition, b) the potential to impact animal and public health derived from such antimicrobial use, and c) lack of similar international guidelines.

Topics adopted by the EGCG will have to be approved by the ESCMID Guidelines Director (GD). The EGCG is responsible for preparation of the proposal to the ESCMID GD.

3 Principles of Veterinary Practice Guidelines development, key persons and responsibilities

ESGVM guidelines should be developed with adherence to the principles detailed in the Appraisal of Guidelines Research and Evaluation Collaboration (AGREE II) self-assessment tool.
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The EGCG will appoint the chair and approve the composition of the DG. All members of the DG must complete the ESCMID disclosure form concerning conflict of interest which will be evaluated by the ESCMID Guideline Directors office according to the ESCMID criteria (ESCMID OP Guidance for Clinical Practice management 4.3).

https://www.escmid.org/membership_organization/about_escmid/operating_procedures/escmid_conflict_of_interest_form/

The DG should be composed of 10 – 14 people and include experts in the narrow field under investigation and people with a wider perspective. The DG should include clinical experts, microbiologists, pharmacologists and key opinion leaders. Participation of at least one panel member proficient in the methodology of systematic reviews and guidelines development processes is strongly encouraged. The DG chair should be recruited from the ESGVM. The EGCG will appoint at least one member from the core group to take part in and assist the DG panel. DG members should be drawn from the ESGVM whenever possible; however, the required expertise may be sought outside the ESGVM. When composing the DG panel the balance in terms of gender and country should be sought. The drafting group may commission the preparation of systematic reviews to other researchers. Such researchers are included in the drafting group as ancillary members. Ancillary members participate in conducting the systematic reviews but do not take part in phrasing and grading of recommendations. Ancillary members are co-authors of the publication and their role is specified in the final document. The Composition of the drafting group must obtain final approval from the ESCMID Guidelines Director.

4 Finances

Financial support from industry is not allowed. Funding from non-commercial sources can be sought. The ECGC should pursue financial support from the ESCMID Guideline Director whenever appropriate.

5 Timeline
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The expected time from approval of the DG to the submission of the guidelines for ratification by ESGVM is 12-18 months after appointment of the DG.

6 Format of guidelines and assessment of evidence

The DG Chair is responsible for drafting the Guidelines protocol. The protocol is sent to the ESCMID Guidelines Directors office. Guidelines should address the key issues and questions should focus on management and interventions where a change in practice is desirable or where controversy exists.

Questions to be addressed in the guidelines are decided upon by the DG in a consensus process.

Guidelines may contain background questions and foreground questions. Background questions will typically provide information on prevalence and incidence of a disease and its forms. Background questions should not investigate standard information unless associated with uncertainty or controversy. Foreground questions typically concerns management and interventions and are the most important part of the guidelines.

All questions should be phrased as research questions. The PICO (Population Intervention Comparator Outcome) framework should be used whenever possible when phrasing foreground questions that relate to comparative questions. For each PICO research question the evidence from the veterinary field should be assessed based on properly conducted systematic reviews (including the “a priori” development of protocols), whenever possible. In the absence of published systematic reviews, a systematic review must be conducted by the drafting group.

The ESGVM encourages the use of GRADE to assess and grade the available evidence and to grade the recommendations. The GRADE approach is described in detail elsewhere and DG members must familiarize themselves with the approach. Evidence may be categorized into good, moderate, low and very low. The latter two categories may be fused into one (very/low). The direction (for or against an intervention) and the strength of the recommendations (strong or weak) will be based
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on quality of the evidence in the veterinary litterature and clinical expertise taking into account also the knowledge from the human field, the anticipated values and preferences and the cost/benefit balance. Deviations from the GRADE approach must be clearly stated and the label of guidance will be changed in case the GRADE approach cannot be adhered to.

The final recommendations will be subjected to a consensus vote. The level of agreement should be displayed and reasons for not agreeing should be listed in the final document.

7 External public review

ESGVM guidelines will be submitted to a public consultation phase before submission. The ESCMID Guidelines Directors office informs DG chair about the start of the public consultation phase. The public phase (4 weeks) will be announced on the ESCMID website and disseminated through all ESCMID channels. Veterinary reviewers appointed by the DG will be contacted actively to ensure feed back from the veterinary community. Key veterinary organizations may be involved for this purpose (see section 8). Veterinary reviewers should represent experts in the field, representatives of the target audience (practitioners) and stakeholders. The draft guideline and comment form available by email upon request. The ESCMID Guideline Directors office collects comments and provides them to DG chair at the end of the public consultation phase. The DG has 4 weeks to write rebuttal document (the DG is under no obligation to accept any criticism that is made, but a response is required) and to finalize the guideline (extensions need to be approved by the ESCMID Guidelines Director).

The final draft must be approved by the EGCG and the ESCMID Guidelines Director prior to submission.

8 Dissemination Strategies

The EGCG aims at establishing contact with a broad panel of veterinary organizations and agencies in order to promote dissemination of recommendations developed in ESGVM guidelines.
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ESGVM guidelines and position papers must be published in OPEN ACCESS veterinary journals. The most appropriate journal will be decided by the DG taking into consideration the audience targeted by the guidelines. Early agreement with the editor in chief of the target journal is strongly recommended. All documents will be available on the ESGVM homepage.

9 Joint Guidelines with other organizations

ESGVM encourages collaboration with other organizations. The DG will involve other veterinary organizations in order to achieve official endorsement or to publish joint guidelines. Both situations may require an internal review process within the veterinary organization(s) involved. When ESGVM participates in joint guidelines chaired by other organizations deviations from the ESGVM SOP may be acceptable.