Lessons learned during ongoing development of the ACCORD reporting guideline for studies using consensus methodologies

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WHY ACCORD IS NEEDED

• Consensus methods provide a structured way to harness the knowledge of experts and other stakeholders, such as patients and non-academic partners, to support critical decision-making in areas in which evidence is limited, inconsistent or absent.

• However, the reporting of consensus studies is often inconsistent and incomplete, which makes it difficult to critically evaluate their methodology and interpret their recommendations.

• ACCORD (ACCurate COnsensus Reporting Document) is a reporting guideline currently in development to help researchers report the results of biomedical consensus studies.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

• Based on EQUATOR guidance, the ACCORD process comprises five stages, of which three have been completed, as described below:
  1. Stage 1: Define methodology (May 2021 to August 2022): establish scope, protocol, and composition of committees and panels.
  2. Stage 2: Systematic literature review (SLR; November 2021 to September 2022) - Stage 3: Agree checklist items (May 2022 to March 2023) - Stage 4: Create reporting guideline (March-April 2023)
  3. The Steering Committee discussed lessons learned from the ACCORD process to date (see Figure) at a face-to-face meeting held in Oxford, UK in September 2022, via email in October and November 2022, and at an online meeting in March 2023.
  4. The full project timeline to date is available as supplementary material. Early planning and clarity of focus is needed for the planning process or the overall project.

Overall Project Lessons

1. Early planning and clarity of focus are vital. Do not underestimate the time required for the planning process or the overall time that will be required for the project.

2. Transparency is critical. Show your thinking/working by publishing and registering your protocol, ensuring that users of your tool understand your process, and sharing your findings and experiences widely.

3. Regular meetings maintain momentum. Ensure actions receive regular updates and that outputs from different workstreams are shared with the full Steering Committee.

4. Be pragmatic. A protocol is a roadmap that captures the best available understanding of the route to obtain study results. However, consensus is an iterative process. Allowing for minor adaptations—and reporting them—can enhance usability and incorporate nuanced information into the final results.

References


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