



Working with clinical experts

May 2015

If you're producing information with medical content, it's essential that clinical experts are involved in its development – with medical review forming a key part of the production process. Although any

Who to ask?

You will need to ask a health professional who is currently practising, with direct expertise in the area you're covering. This may be a doctor, dentist, physiotherapist, pharmacist, nurse or other health professional – you'll need to choose whoever is most relevant to your topic. Depending on the information you're

Where to find?

Try contacting relevant professional organisations – such as the Royal Colleges, or membership associations for different health professionals. They may have individuals willing to help, or can put you in touch with potential reviewers. You could also try leading

medical content should be based on reliable and up-to-date references, expert review is vital in confirming whether it's an accurate and fair reflection of what patients can expect in practice.

producing, you may need more than one expert. For instance, you may want a GP and a cardiologist to comment on a publication on heart disease; or a GP and a physiotherapist for information on muscle strain.

charities in the relevant field, who often employ or work with clinicians.

Finally, you could search for specialist doctors in the relevant field on hospital websites.

What to ask?

This will depend on the type of content you're getting reviewed, but suggestions of what to ask include the following.

- Do you think the information is accurate and reflective of current practice?
- In your opinion, have we interpreted the evidence accurately for patients in our content?
- Do you think we've missed anything in our information?
- Are you aware of any recent changes in guidance/evidence, or upcoming guidance/evidence due to be published soon?
- Would you recommend this resource to your patients?

Expectations

It's important to make it clear from the outset exactly what you're asking reviewers to do – as well as what you're not asking them to do. It's worth setting up some guidelines, and/or terms and conditions for new reviewers. In general, clinical experts should be

asked to comment on the accuracy of the medical content in your publication and not on language, tone or style – which is where you will have the expertise.

Giving feedback

There are several ways you can ask reviewers to give feedback – find a system that works best for you and the type of content you're producing.

- Comments via email . You may want to prompt feedback with a few questions such as the ones suggested above. Make sure you save any email correspondence you have.
- Comments function and/or tracked changes in Word documents. Allowing reviewers to directly modify text through tracked changes can be a helpful way of immediately seeing any proposed changes. On the flip side, it can be unhelpful for reviewers to rewrite large portions of text which you may then need to edit for style.

- Comments function in Adobe Acrobat. This can be useful if you'd prefer to protect your documents when sending out for review.

Potential issues

Any suggestions your expert reviewer makes will need to be backed up by evidence, if you're going to incorporate them into your content. If your reviewer highlights any inaccuracies or missing information, for instance, you will need to go back to your reference sources to verify these. If your reviewer's comments conflict with key evidence or current guidelines, you may have to disregard them; however if there are no guidelines or little evidence, expert opinion may be more valid.

About the author

This fact sheet was produced for PiF by Pippa Coulter. Pippa is a specialist in the production of consumer health content, with 15 years of experience in medical publishing and communications. She has extensive experience in producing high-quality, reliable and evidence-based health content for consumers. Pippa currently manages the health content library at Bupa. View Pippa's profile on [LinkedIn](#).

- Using your own template to provide comments – perhaps including a questionnaire to fill in, or prompting reviewers to give feedback on certain points.

Similarly, if you're asking for feedback from more than one reviewer, there is always the risk of conflicting advice. If there's a point that reviewers disagree on, you should always refer back to your sources of reference to see where there is the strongest evidence.

About PiF

PiF is a non-profit organisations working to improve the quality and accessibility of health information for patients and public across the UK. Our work involves: delivering resources and events for information producers; influencing to raise the profile of health information; and bringing together those interested in the field of health information via the PiF network. You can find out more at www.pifonline.org.uk.