

Implementing NCEP Guidelines in a Web-based Disease-Management System

Fu-Chiang Tsui¹, Ph.D., Michael Wagner¹, M.D., Ph.D., and Mark E. Thompson², M.D.

¹Center for Biomedical Informatics, ²Division of Cardiology
University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

DMS is a Web-based disease-management system, which facilitates easy access for users and close connection to hospital information systems, based on clinical practice guidelines. Currently we are prototyping DMS in the area of hyperlipidemia management. However our approach is general. For each office visit, DMS generates an encounter form with recommendations based on the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) guidelines. In between visits, DMS provides email notifications to clinicians about delinquent laboratory studies and recommendations for patient management based on recently available information.

By reviewing previous efforts for implementing NCEP guidelines and some of the pitfalls that were encountered, we first constructed DMS for hyperlipidemia management. A detailed description of DMS is provided in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes a disease-management system (DMS). Currently, we are prototyping DMS in the area of hyperlipidemia management. It provides easy access of web-based recommendations for the treatment of hyperlipidemia based on the National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) guidelines¹. With the aid of the hospital information system MARS² at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC), DMS can automatically fetch patients' necessary laboratory works from MARS to fulfill the NCEP guidelines. Moreover, DMS not only communicates with MARS but also provides interactive data input from users via world-wide-web ('WWW'). The latter function is helpful in a small clinic without a central information system. In addition, a notification module in DMS, which provides e-mail notification, is designed to enhance the practical usage of the NCEP guidelines.

Many patients with hyperlipidemia ultimately develop coronary heart disease or generalized peripheral vascular disease, both of which are extremely important public health problems³. Recent large clinical trials have demonstrated that effective reduction of the low-density lipoprotein levels resulted in a significant reduction (30%) in morbidity and mortality in the study population⁴. However, this

reduction in risk has not been generally achieved because of significant barriers to implementation of effective programs. In practice, fewer than 25% of patients with modifiable risk factors (smoking, hypertension and hypercholesterolemia) are being effectively treated. The discordance between accepted management standards and "usual practice" also exists in other common diseases such as hypertension and diabetes. Accordingly, there is a critical need to identify and to implement cost-effective web-based disease-management system in daily practice. DMS offers the potential to achieve this goal.

In this paper, we first review past experience in developing systems to implement guidelines and the problems that have been encountered in the process. Based on the lessons we learned, we present the desired disease-management system and DMS structure.

REVIEW OF NCEP GUIDELINES IMPLEMENTATION

The efforts of other investigators to implement the clinical guidelines were directed in three areas of research: a) representation of the guidelines in a computer format, b) incorporation of decision-support guidance into the clinical work flow, and c) improving compliance with the computer-generated advice.

Computer Representation of the Guidelines

One barrier to the implementation of practice guidelines is their complexity. This makes it difficult to represent the guidelines in a computer format. Schiffman et al⁵ (1993) found that both decision tables augmented with probability and term subsumption considerably reduced the number of rules necessary to implement clinical practice guidelines.

Another barrier to computer implementation of clinical guidelines involved representation of the guidelines. Starren and Xie⁶ (1994) compared three knowledge representation formalisms (CLASSIC, PROLOGUE, and CLIPS⁷) used to encode the NCEP guidelines. CLIPS was found to be the most useful way to conceptualize states and rules and to specify patient attributes. On the other hand, incomplete or

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Table of Contents Ncep Guidelines 201

1. Understanding the eBook Ncep Guidelines 201
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Ncep Guidelines 201
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Ncep Guidelines 201
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Ncep Guidelines 201
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Ncep Guidelines 201
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Ncep Guidelines 201 User Reviews and Ratings

- Ncep Guidelines 201 and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing Ncep Guidelines 201 Free and Paid eBooks
 - Ncep Guidelines 201 Public Domain eBooks
 - Ncep Guidelines 201 eBook Subscription Services
 - Ncep Guidelines 201 Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating Ncep Guidelines 201 eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Ncep Guidelines 201 Compatibility with Devices
 - Ncep Guidelines 201 Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Ncep Guidelines 201
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Ncep Guidelines 201
 - Interactive Elements Ncep Guidelines 201
- 8. Staying Engaged with Ncep Guidelines 201
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Ncep Guidelines 201
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Ncep Guidelines 201
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Ncep Guidelines 201
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Ncep Guidelines 201
 - Setting Reading Goals Ncep Guidelines 201
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Ncep Guidelines 201
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Ncep Guidelines 201
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources

13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
 - Integration of Multimedia Elements
 - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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