

SA Medical Research Council Intramural Research Units Flagship Projects Grant

Project SAGE: South African Guidelines Excellence – a Flagship Project

Project SAGE: has been made possible as a result of a three year (2014-2016) Flagship Grant from the South African Medical Research Council (MRC). The project is being undertaken via a partnership between the South African (SA) Cochrane Centre; SA Medical Research Council Health Systems Research Unit; Stellenbosch University Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences and the International Centre for Allied Health Evidence (iCAHE), University of South Australia.

Research team

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Aim

Project SAGE will provide an innovative leadership plan to apply relevant clinical practice guidelines efficiently and effectively, to improve outcomes within primary health care.

Rationale

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) defines clinical practice guidelines as *statements that include recommendations intended to optimise patient care that are informed by a systematic review of evidence and an assessment of the benefits and harms of alternative care options* [IOM 2011]. High quality, evidence-informed guidelines can bridge the gap between policy, best practice, local context and patient choice to enable quality outcomes.

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Little is known about the quality or amount of clinical practice guideline activity in South Africa, despite the diverse contexts of care found across the country and the limited resources available to underwrite health care for all. In addition, each international guidelines development group has its own processes, and each comes highly recommended – and with no way to select what’s most relevant for various contexts.

There is an urgent need for central concentration of effort to support efficient guidelines use in SA, to improve health care processes, costs and outcomes. We need local research, involving stakeholders with recognised expertise, to improve the flow of information regarding quality guideline development; adaptation or contextualisation; effective implementation; and evaluation. SAGE will bring together SA clinicians, academics, managers, policy makers, patients and other end-users to identify and address barriers to improve clinical behaviours, uptake of evidence and patient care.

Project goals

Phase one: Mapping

- Goal 1 SA guideline stakeholder and agenda mapping: *who is working in this area and why?*
- Goal 2 Primary health care guideline identification and appraisal: *what primary health care guidelines are available and are they useful for SA?*
- Goal 3 Guideline stakeholder requirement mapping: *what help do SA guideline stakeholders need?*

Phase two: Development

- Goal 4 Guideline writing and implementation manual for SA: *a comprehensive ‘how to do it’ guideline manual for SA*

Phase three: Capacity (24-36 months)

- Goal 5 Capacity building, dissemination, training and development

Flagship Projects: big ideas, big science, for big impact

South African Medical Research Council (MRC) Flagship Projects are seen as the MRC intramural research unit’s highest impact and most prestigious research project.

A Flagship Project is inter-disciplinary in scope; addresses an important health problem; is led by accomplished scientists; and generates high impact publications.

The core elements of a Flagship Project are:

- Clear specification of a long-term mission with a research agenda comprising short and intermediate goals to realise a common mission;
- A track record of strong scientific leadership and excellence;

- Inter-disciplinary approach, drawing in scientists from a range of different disciplines;
- A track record of high-impact scientific contributions, and
- Potential for high impact on an important health problem in South Africa.

By funding Flagship Projects, the MRC aims to:

- Generate new knowledge with the potential to impact on health policy and practice;
- Enhance the leadership role of medical research globally;
- Increase the number of South African scientific articles, including articles in high impact journals;
- Develop research infrastructure such as new/upgraded research laboratories or clinical research facilities;
- Support acquisition of new state-of-the-art research equipment or to upgrade existing equipment;
- Contribute to human capacity development, through training and mentoring of post-graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, and
- Support major research costs including salaries of technicians, junior researchers and research support staff.

The expected outcomes of Flagship Projects are:

- Publications in high-impact journals, and
- Research findings that have the potential to translate into policy and practice.