

New tool helps decide what drugs to include in health care formularies

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A new tool that could provide a useful framework for deciding what medicines to include in drug formularies is presented in this week's *PLoS Medicine* by the experts from Harvard Medical School and the University of Illinois at Chicago who developed it.

The experts, led by Gordon Schiff, say: "Formularies and committees that oversee them are present in some form in virtually every US hospital and outpatient drug plan and are highly visible components of public [drug](#) benefits in many countries. Thus decisions made by these committees directly or indirectly impact every prescriber, [pharmacist](#), and patient."

Although considerable attention has been devoted to their role in cost containment, the authors argue that "formularies' role in guiding rational [drug use](#) remains underdeveloped and could be improved by a more standardized critical evaluation of drugs proposed for formulary placement."

So in a joint project, the authors developed a tool consisting of checklist of 48 questions for evaluating drugs to be considered for inclusion in the formulary related to the evidence of need, efficacy, [medication safety](#), misuse potential, cost issues, and decision-making process.

The authors say: "The checklist can facilitate more standardized and critical scrutiny of the evidence and therapeutic alternatives. It can educate new committee members, guide discussions of drugs proposed

for formulary addition, and be used to evaluate the quality of committee decision making."

The authors conclude: "we offer the tool for a broader audience to use and test. We hope that it will prove useful in improving the quality of formulary decision making and stimulating debate related to critical questions that need to be asked, highlighting essential data needed to more safely prescribe drugs."

More information: Schiff GD, Galanter WL, Duhig J, Koronkowski MJ, Lodolce AE, et al. (2012) A Prescription for Improving Drug Formulary Decision Making. *PLoS Med* 9(5): e1001220.

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