

# ETHIC: Evaluation Tool of Health Information for Consumers

## ACTIVITIES

The aim of the ETHIC project is to create a checklist for the quality evaluation of the Health Information for consumers. The checklist is meant to be used by medical librarians and health information professionals.

This tool could have different applications such as: checking the quality of Health Information created by different institutions, performing actions in order to improve quality of information, evaluating documents to implement database and open archives on health information etc. The checklist will be drawn up according to the present literature on Health Information evaluation and, more generally, on plain language writing. In particular, it will be inspired to presently available tools, such as SAM, (Suitability Assessment of Materials), DISCERN (and its Italian version DISCERNere), EQIP (Ensuring Quality Information for Patients), PMOSE/IKIRSCH and others.

This checklist is intended to evaluate written Health Information (edited and available on the web) but, given its modular nature and enhanced with items peculiar to other typologies of documents, it could be easily extended to the evaluation of other kinds of information (e.g. audio and video resources). The checklist will therefore consist of a range of items which are useful for the evaluation of every kind of document and of a range of other specific items.

The quality evaluation of the documents will pertain exclusively to linguistic, textual and documental aspects and it will be performed by giving a score to each item of the list. The final score will result in a percentage calculated on the basis of the maximum score achievable according to the number of items which could be taken into account in evaluating each single document. The scoring method itself will help to make the checklist easily adaptable to the assessment of different kinds of Health Information documents. In fact, the use of a relative score, instead of an absolute one, will offer the possibility to compare the results obtained by different kinds of documents.

Similarly to SAM, it will be possible to assign to the items three different scores, respectively: maximum score, if the document entirely possesses the quality to be evaluated; intermediate score, if it partially possesses the quality to be evaluated; minimum score, if it doesn't possess it at all.

The checklist will include an evaluation of:

- readability (through the GULPEASE index, which is specifically calibrated to the Italian language)
- lexical understandability, related to the amount of words belonging to the Italian Basic Lexicon (i.e. a set of words which can be easily understood by the largest part of the population).

The decision to integrate the readability evaluation (a widespread practice in other countries such as the United States of America) with a systematic evaluation of the use of common words is justified by the intention to ensure a more effective and complete linguistic evaluation of each document (a key aspect of the texts comprehension).

An evaluation of the merely linguistic aspects (readability and use of common words) is provided in other literature tools (e.g. SAM), but this new checklist explicitly offers the possibility to analyse Italian language specific values. These values will be measured through an automated tool (Èulogos® Censor) which will grant the best effectiveness, precision and comparability. The automated evaluation of readability and basic lexicon presence will allow to overcome not only differences in the use of GULPEASE formula among raters, but also arbitrary items such as "Does the text make use of everyday language?" (present in other checklists), thus giving an objective quantification rather than a personal opinion by the evaluator.

Even if this checklist is meant to evaluate Italian language written information, it could be easily adapted to other languages by the replacement of Italian language specific items with others referred to different languages.

As Health Information, in addition to written parts, often include charts, lists and so on, the checklist will embody items to be used in the evaluation of these components (e.g. PMOSE/IKIRSCH).

Each structural choice has been made in order to have a minimum degree of arbitrariness and subjectiveness, which could cause mistakes in the evaluation process. To furtherly reduce these risks, the drawing up of a checklist instruction manual is considered integral part of the ETHIC project. The manual will help to ensure the correct use of the tool (as for the scoring of single items), thus making the checklist reliable and minimizing evaluation differences among different evaluators.

Moreover, both checklist and instruction manual will clearly state that quality evaluation will only refer to linguistic, textual and documental aspects.

Both checklist and instruction manual will be available to the public, thus allowing the transparency of the evaluation process and letting the evaluation process of Health Information be not only a judgement but a virtuous linkage among information producers, medical librarians/health information professionals and consumers.

The evaluation tool will then undergo a field test evaluating Health Information by promoters and partners of this project. This will make it possible to spot checklist mistakes which could be improved taking into account the problems arising in the test period. Furthermore, for the final version of the checklist, the opinion of an internationally acknowledged Health Literacy expert will be taken into account (Dr Rima E. Rudd, Senior Lecturer at the Harvard School of Public Health, has been contacted).

Afterwards, other partners could be involved in the checklist field testing on Health Information evaluation (Health Service Authorities, Patients associations, institutions from other countries etc.). If the checklist performances are appropriate, entitled advisors could be involved in writing recommendations on the checklist use.

## TIMELINE

The ETHIC project will last 2 years and the activities will be scheduled according to the following scheme:

ACTIVITIES	MONTHS																							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Drawing up of checklist / instruction manual	■	■	■	■	■	■																		
Evaluating health information by project promoters and partners and checklist adjustment if needed							■	■	■	■	■	■												
Involvement of other partners in Health Information evaluation													■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Writing recommendations on checklist use																					■	■	■	■

## PROPOSED OUTCOME

The result of this project will be a new tool capable of evaluating Health Information, which will be authoritative (as it is literature-based), user friendly, adaptable to different kinds of information and to information written in languages other than Italian. Thanks to the instruction manual joined to the checklist, it will be reliable for use by different evaluators.

Furthermore, ETHIC project could play a decisive role in enhancing medical librarians' and health information professionals' expertise, as they will have at their disposal a new tool to contribute in developing health information of increasing quality. As a consequence, medical librarians and Health information professionals will be considered more active agents in the Health Information process and in the Health Literacy field.

Therefore, the ETHIC project aims to promote an evaluation process of Health Information not only directed to the formulation of a judgment but also, thanks to a reliable and clear tool, at encouraging:

- a virtuous linkage among different professionals which take part in the Health Information process (medical librarians and health information professionals included) with the acknowledgment and the enhancement of their specific expertise;
- consumers' cooperation; as a matter of fact, quality evaluation could become an educational tool (developing abilities and consumers' critical sense about Health Information) and could help patients/consumers to be more involved in developing and testing Health Information.

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