WEAK recommendations – should I care?
Background

- Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) is a widely used rating system.
- Several COG-endorsed supportive care guidelines have used the GRADE approach.

**GRADE** classifies
Recommendations as STRONG or WEAK
and
Quality of the Evidence* as VERY LOW, LOW, MODERATE or HIGH

*Reflects the level of confidence that the estimate of an intervention’s effect is correct.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Quality of the body of evidence</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strength of Recommendation</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High ⊕⊕⊕⊕</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strong</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are very confident that the true effect lies close to that of the estimate of the effect</td>
<td>Most people would want and should receive the recommended course of action. The recommendation can be adapted as a policy in most situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate ⊕⊕⊕</strong></td>
<td><strong>Weak</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are moderately confident in the effect estimate: The true effect is likely to be close to the estimate of the effect, but there is a possibility that it is substantially different</td>
<td>There is a need for substantial debate and involvement of stakeholders in policy making. The majority of people would want the recommended course of action, but many would not. Clinicians should be more prepared to help patients to make a decision that is consistent with their own values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low ⊕⊕</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our confidence in the effect estimate is limited: The true effect may be substantially different from the estimate of the effect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Low ⊕</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have very little confidence in the effect estimate: The true effect is likely to be substantially different from the estimate of effect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**website:** [http://www.gradeworkinggroup.org/](http://www.gradeworkinggroup.org/)
In this module we explain what a **WEAK GRADE GUIDELINE RECOMMENDATION** is and how to integrate such recommendations into your practice.
GRADE recommendations: A balance of factors

Possible factors:
- Benefits and Harms
- Quality of the Evidence
- Values
- Acceptability
- Feasibility
- Equity
- Costs

For

Against
Because GRADE incorporates separate judgments of evidence quality and strength of recommendation…

High quality evidence does not necessarily lead to a strong recommendation

and

Low quality evidence does not always lead to a weak recommendation

The world's childhood cancer experts
Weak recommendation

If after weighing all factors, the guideline panel believes the desirable and undesirable effects are either:

(a) finely balanced

or

(b) appreciable uncertainty exists about the magnitude of effects

the panel will make a weak recommendation
GRADE example: Should mobile adults in long-term care who are not at high risk of hip fracture wear hip protectors?

Weighing the factors:

- Moderate quality evidence (i.e. moderately confident that hip protectors provide a small reduction in hip fractures in this population),
- However, they are burdensome to wear and there is a financial cost associated with their use.
The guideline panel placed a high value on avoiding the serious consequences of hip fractures and a lower value on the burden for an individual or for the long-term care home’s resources.

A **WEAK recommendation** was made for adults in long-term who are not at high risk of hip fracture to wear hip protectors.

**This means:**
The majority of patients will want to use hip protectors, but some will not; clinicians will need to consider the conditions and patient preferences under which to recommend this intervention.
## Implications for practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implications</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For patients</td>
<td>The majority of people in this situation would want the recommended course of action, but some would not*.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For clinicians</td>
<td>Clinicians should recognize that different choices will be appropriate for each individual and that clinicians must help each individual arrive at a management decision consistent with his or her values and preferences. Decision aids may be useful to help individuals make decisions consistent with their values and preferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For policy makers</td>
<td>Policy-making will require substantial debate and involvement of various stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Modified wording slightly for clarity

Source: [http://www.gradeworkinggroup.org/](http://www.gradeworkinggroup.org/)
Want to learn more about GRADE?
Visit: https://cebgrade.mcmaster.ca/training/

Acknowledgement:
Example courtesy of Dr. Nancy Santesso, GRADE group