The Royal College of Pathologists
Pathology: the science behind the cure

Authorship of clinical guidelines

Authorship general standards

1. All commissioned clinical guidelines should have a designated lead author and must be written by at least two authors including the lead author.
2. An author may commit to lead on a maximum number of two guidelines at any given time. It is acceptable for a lead author of two guidelines at any given time to co-author two other guidelines.
3. Guideline lead authors should be aware of unconscious bias and diversity when selecting co-authors – for example, career stage, gender, geographic location, race, ethnicity, etc – without compromising the ability to perform in their role.
4. Pathology trainees and consultant pathologists interested in gaining expertise in the guideline topic should be given the opportunity to join the guideline writing group for training, development, and contribution to the guidelines.
5. Pathologists who are not currently practicing diagnostic pathology should not be involved in writing guidelines. For clarity, "retired" refers to fully retired individuals and not those who are partially retired. However, under exceptional circumstances, fully retired pathologists with current expertise may participate in guideline review and publication with the agreement of the lead author. While it is generally preferred that retirees do not serve as lead authors, they may act as co-authors or co-lead authors. In specific cases where their expertise and available time significantly benefit guideline development, a retired pathologist may be permitted to lead an authoring team with approval from the relevant subspecialty advisory lead or the Specialty Advisory Committee (SAC).
6. The guidelines must be written with a view to their applicability and implementation in the NHS and take into account non-NHS/international considerations where appropriate. The writing of guidelines should be undertaken by members of the College who are familiar with NHS working practices/resources and with an interest in the topic.
7. All authors must agree to follow the format specified in the College document: *Guidance for authors on writing guidelines*. This includes completing any required documentation to fulfil the authorship role.

8. On volunteering to be part of a guideline writing group, authors are agreeing to submit the first draft on schedule and to review the document no later than 3 years (for cancer datasets) and 5 years for other guidelines (e.g. tissue pathways). Authors that are not able to deliver guidelines on time may be asked to step down to allow other authors the opportunity to be involved in the guideline development process.
9. Authors will take public responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the content of the guidelines.
10. Authors will be responsible for the development of an audit template and the delivery of an online webinar (for cancer datasets and tissue pathways) to support the implementation of the guidelines. The latter should be done within three months of the guideline being published.

Authorship selection process

The decision of who should be a guideline lead author falls under the relevant subspecialty advisory lead and/or the specialty advisory committee (SAC). The subspecialty lead or the SAC chair will appoint the pathologist with most suitable expertise to lead the guideline writing group. Once the lead author is confirmed, the Professional Guidelines team will send a formal letter to confirm the role and responsibilities.

Lead authors are responsible for deciding who should be a co-author in accordance with their expertise in the topic and to conform with the above authorship general standards. They are accountable for the selection of co-authors and they should primarily take into consideration applications submitted to the College, and nominees' areas of knowledge, experience and expertise should reflect the criteria set out in section 3.

Lead authors must lead communication on behalf of the writing group, encourage collaboration of co-authorship with colleagues and coordinate the planning and contribution of the guidelines.

Authorship should be reserved only for those who have made a significant contribution to the guideline and be at least involved in one of the following:

- planning and contribution to some component (conception, design, conduct, analysis, or interpretation)
- writing or contributing to some components of the guidelines (e.g. integrating findings in the literature review).

College members across all pathology specialties can apply to become a co-author of a guideline on their specialty of interest or expertise by submitting evidence or previous work and a briefing to the Professional Guidelines team via guidelines@rcpath.org. Submitted applications will be reviewed and considered by the lead author and feedback provided for unsuccessful nominees.

Authors of guidelines will be reminded of their commitment to deliver the guideline on time. If authors do not respond to the last reminder (a letter from the Registrar), they will be automatically removed from the guideline writing group.

If there is a dispute or a clash of personalities between the lead author and co-author(s), it should be reported to the Professional Guidelines team at guidelines@rcpath.org. If the dispute cannot be settled by the authors, the Professional Guidelines team will guide the authors to help them reach a mediated solution. If necessary, a representative specialised in the guideline topic will be involved to support the process.