



Effective Health Care

Diagnosis and Management of Cough

Nomination Summary Document

Results of Topic Selection Process & Next Steps

- Diagnosis and management of chronic cough will go forward for refinement as a systematic review. The scope of this topic, including populations, interventions, comparators, and outcomes, will be further developed in the refinement phase.
- When key questions have been drafted, they will be posted on the AHRQ Web site and open for public comment. To sign up for notification when this and other Effective Health Care (EHC) Program topics are posted for public comment, please go to <http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/index.cfm/join-the-email-list1/>.

Topic Description

Nominator: Health care professional association

Nomination Summary: The nominator desires an evidence review on the comparative effectiveness of tools to assess cough severity and treatments for cough in order to update clinical practice guidelines on the diagnosis and management of chronic cough in children and adults.

Staff-Generated PICO:

Population(s): Adults (age 18 years and older) and adolescents (age 14 to 18 years) with cough of more than 8 weeks' duration; children (age 14 years and younger) with cough of more than 3 weeks' duration. Patients with comorbidities will be included.

Intervention(s): Instruments/tools used to assess cough severity and treatments for cough.

Comparator(s): For qualitative tools used to assess cough severity: health-related quality of life instruments; visual analog scales; objective cough counting; exhaled nitric oxide; and tussigenic challenge. For treatment approaches: antitussive and/or protussive medications, cough suppressants, and placebo.

Outcome(s): For cough severity assessment: inter- and intra-rater reliability; test-retest reliability; and responsiveness (standardized response mean and responsiveness index). For treatment efficacy: improvement in cough symptoms; cough severity; cough counts; cough-related quality of life; complications caused by coughing; and adverse reactions to cough therapies.

Key Questions from Nominator:

1. What is the best way to assess cough severity and the efficacy of cough therapies?
2. What is the best way to manage unexplained, refractory chronic cough in adults?
3. What is the best way to manage cough in children?

4. Which cough therapies should be prescribed for a cough (per population, cough severity, cough etiology)?

Considerations

- The topic meets all EHC Program selection criteria. (For more information, see <http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/index.cfm/submit-a-suggestion-for-research/how-are-research-topics-chosen/>.)
- Cough is one of the most common symptoms for which patients seek medical advice, miss work and school, and increase healthcare spending. It accounts for a significant volume of complaints presented to primary care providers. Cough is also an important factor in the spread of infectious disease. Unexplained and chronic cough are a challenge to clinicians. Several randomized controlled trials have shown no effect or harmful effects of over-the-counter medications in children, but few have shown positive results for treatment alternatives. Duration of treatment is not clearly specified in existing guidelines and optimal management remains uncertain in some areas.
- Guidelines and systematic reviews exist for the topic but are either outdated or do not employ rigorous methodology. Therefore, this topic will move forward as a new systematic review conducted by the EHC Program.