

# Oral Care Protocols in Germany

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## Abstract

Extensive healthcare experience in Germany has led to the establishment of medical protocols that could be borrowed for use in Bulgaria. The purpose of these protocols is to facilitate the diagnosis and treatment process regardless of the medical practitioner's experience in terms of duration, speciality, and field of expertise. The German standard in developing protocols for use in the field of oral medicine could be applied in Bulgaria.

**Keywords:** Germany, medical protocols, development standards

## Background

The well-structured and functioning dental care system in Germany is a generally recognized fact. The extensive German experience and strict control in the field of dental medicine have led to the establishment of medical protocols that could be borrowed for use in Bulgaria (1)

Medical protocols applied in Germany are systematic sets of guidelines that all medical, dental, and other healthcare professionals follow in making their choices of treatment type, medications, and healthcare services to deliver to a patient, depending on clinical circumstances. Unlike legislation, protocols are not mandatory but their use guarantees an optimal clinical outcome, legal protection, and the lowest possible risk for the patient. Some decisions require taking into account the patient's condition and the possible financial implications of the treatment (2,3,4).

Protocols do not specify the ratio of positive outcomes. They usually contain no statement on expected treatment results, either. The purpose of a protocol is to facilitate the diagnosis and treatment process regardless of the dentist's experience in terms of duration, speciality, and field of expertise(5).

Protocols are constantly updated to keep in pace with all scientifically proven and practically tested innovations in dental medicine. As a result, all dental practitioners in Germany have access to innovations included in the protocols (5).

**Standards applied in the development of protocols in the fields of oral care, oral surgery, and maxillofacial surgery in Germany (6,7,8,9,10).**

The German Society of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (DGZMK) is an umbrella organization of 34 specialized companies, research groups and associations. With its approximately 20,000 members, it is one of Europe's largest medical and research societies covering as much as 37 percent of all dentists practicing in Germany. The purpose of this organization is to optimize the work of dental practitioners by updating them on innovations in dental care to increase their awareness and improve patient treatment.

Devising a medical protocol is a systematic process involving a multidisciplinary teamwork of medical professionals, lawyers, public activists, patient organizations etc. While working on the protocol, its authors receive guidelines also from the Association of Scientific Medical Societies (AWMF) and the Centre for Dental Quality (ZZQ) in Germany.

The AWMF classifies medical protocols into 4 groups: S1, S2K, S2e, and S3, where S3 has the highest grade of methodological development.

S1: The protocol has been developed by an expert group based on an informal consensus.

S2K: The protocol has been developed by an expert group based on a formal consensus.

S2e: Systematic research evidence has been provided.

S3: The guidelines present with all elements of systematic development.

Methodologically, the S3 protocol has a higher quality than protocols S2 or S1.

Upon approval, protocols are published by the German Society of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and the Federal Chamber of Dentists in specialized journals of dental medicine and emailed to all users.

The protocol content is devised following the recommendations given by the German Instrument for Methodological Guideline Appraisal (Deutsche Leitlinien-Bewertungsinstrument-DELBI) based on the AWMF rules (11,12).

The algorithm follows a preset matrix that makes it easier for the authors to take into account all requirements and the sequence of steps to achieve the protocols.

| <u>Steps to devise and coordinate medical protocols (05.11.2016) (13):</u> |  |                       |
|--|--|-----------------------|
| 1  | <p>Analysis of the need for a medical protocol and prioritization of possible topics based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- disease incidence</li> <li>- medical relevance /severity of disease (mortality, morbidity, functional damage)</li> <li>- new treatment methods</li> <li>- contradictory research data</li> <li>- economic relevance and significance in terms of health insurance</li> <li>- optimization of care quality</li> <li>- ethical and social impacts</li> <li>- informational needs in terms of new technology</li> <li>- coordinating an interdisciplinary team</li> </ul> | DGZMK                 |
| 2  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appointing a Protocol Coordinator</li> <li>- Finding a multidisciplinary author team</li> <li>- Registering the project with the AWMF, filing a registration form</li> </ul>  | DGZMK                 |
| 3  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Constituent meeting</li> <li>- Pre-project analysis, setting the goals and objectives, and defining project stages</li> <li>- Targeting</li> <li>- Discussing key issues and methodological approach</li> <li>- Project planning</li> <li>- Devising the medical protocol with AWMF criteria in mind</li> </ul>   | Author team           |
| 4  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General approval</li> <li>- Approval by the boards of directors of professional organizations and associations involved</li> <li>- Submission to the AWMF for evaluation and approval</li> </ul>  | DGZMK                 |
| 5  | <p>Dissemination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Publication on the web sites of the AWMF and the Federal Chamber of Dentists</li> <li>- Auxiliary channels : publication in scientific journals and websites</li> </ul>   | DGZMK                 |
| 6  | Update   | DGZMK and author team |

## Conclusion

Many patients seeing a dental professional suffer from some chronic disease, receive medication or need a specific treatment. Clinicians need to take into account the patient's condition and the risks associated with the use of some drugs. Prevention and monitoring are required to avoid complications. To facilitate diagnosis and treatment for every medical practitioner in Germany, medical protocols have been established. The German standard in devising medical protocols could be applied in Bulgaria.

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