

Jargon-free science

We inform the general public about health issues in an easy-to-read style. This is one of our legal responsibilities. Our main vehicle for doing so is the Institute's website www.informedhealthonline.org (Gesundheitsinformation.de), where we provide freely available and clearly presented articles, diagrams and short films on a wide range of medical topics and health issues.

informedhealthonline

INDEPENDENT, OBJECTIVE AND EVIDENCE-BASED

Our Informed Health Online website offers patients, friends, relatives and others a source of independent, reliable, evidence-based health information. We do not provide advice, though. Instead, it is our aim to help people make their own informed health decisions.

The topics we cover are determined in several ways: Firstly, the Health Information Department summarises the results of work done by IQWiG departments under commission from the German Federal Joint Committee (G-BA) and the Federal Ministry of Health (BMG). Secondly, the Health Information Department receives direct commissions from the G-BA and the Ministry. Thirdly, it develops products on its own initia-

tive in topic areas where it sees a need for independent, quality-assured information for the general public. The information on our website is available in German and English. Readers can subscribe to a newsletter if they would like to be informed about our latest publications.

www.informedhealthonline.org

Reliable information, improved health care

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Institute for Quality and Efficiency
in Health Care

Tasks, approach and objectives

Who we are

Quality and efficiency: these are two key factors needed to keep the German healthcare system effective into the future. That is why it is important to objectively evaluate healthcare services. That is exactly what the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) does.

We are an independent scientific institute that assesses the benefits and harms of healthcare interventions. Everything we do is in the public domain – we do not work behind closed doors. We provide up-to-date information on which therapeutic and diagnostic services are useful and which are not.

For example, IQWiG assesses medicines and treatment guidelines as well as surgical, diagnostic and screening procedures. The topics covered include common conditions like diabetes and hypertension, dementia and depression. We do not only aim to serve experts and stakeholders in the healthcare system, but healthcare consumers as well.

What we do

IQWiG does not carry out trials itself. We systematically search international literature for trials that, for example, have compared medicines or surgical procedures with each other. The research that provides the most reliable results is identified and then analysed so that we can reach an overall conclusion about the possible benefits and harms of an intervention.

The decisive criteria are outcomes that are important for patients. It is not enough for a drug to simply alter the results of a lab test: It should enable people to live longer, reduce their symptoms or complications, or improve their quality of life.

IQWiG uses the methods and standards of evidence-based medicine (EBM) to select and evaluate studies. This scientific approach makes it possible to assess how reliable the available information really is.

We work together with external researchers commissioned by IQWiG. Manufacturers, professional associations and patients can also be involved during the development process of IQWiG evaluations. We invite them to comment on preliminary versions of reports. In this way, important studies or arguments that have been overlooked can be pointed out.

Who we work for

IQWiG was established by legislation during the healthcare reform in 2004. The evaluations we undertake are mainly commissioned by the German Federal Joint Committee (G-BA), the decision-making self-governance body of the German healthcare system. Physicians, dentists, psychotherapists, hospitals and health insurance funds are represented in the G-BA. The Institute is financed from statutory health insurance (SHI) levies.

IQWiG works independently. Neither industry nor health insurance funds nor public authorities can influence our evaluations. The G-BA then independently decides what consequences the results of evaluations will have for SHI-insured patients.

The German Federal Ministry of Health is the only other body that can commission IQWiG. The Institute also undertakes projects and research work that is relevant for the healthcare system on its own initiative. We could be commissioned to assess the costs of medical interventions too.

... and how you benefit.

Patients and their doctors usually have several options to consider. We would like to help people decide which option is best for them. One of the ways we do this is by providing independent and easy-to-understand health information on a separate website for the general public, Informed Health Online.

A healthcare system that serves 70 million people has to be run on a rational basis: Claims that an intervention works must be backed up with evidence. Simply hoping that it will work is not enough. Our evaluations may sometimes lead to the conclusion that there is no clearly proven benefit. We will also point out if reliable information is missing. This is necessary in order to set research priorities.

IQWiG starts discussions in the interests of patients and decision-makers so that interventions of proven benefit can be identified and remain affordable. In this way we help to fill in the knowledge gaps and improve health care in Germany.