"Best practice" is a concept that is used in virtually every professional discipline and industry. Broadly speaking, it establishes (and justifies) a decision-making process. At its best, a best practice describes a clear, concrete, repeatable behavior that can be consistently applied to solve a specific problem.


Putting “best” in context
For a grammarian, best is a superlative. While a comparative considers the quality of one thing relative to another; a superlative compares one thing to an entire category. It may seem to be a fixed point—the best is the best, period—but in reality, the biggest, fastest, flimsiest, or cheapest is always at risk of being supplanted. This means that “best” as used in “best practice” is relative. With
regard to a policy or practice in health care, “best” is always a moveable target to be regularly reconsidered and evaluated. It exists at a moment in time and is understood in context. Regular benchmarking (internal and external) is one way for health care organizations to be sure that they are not falling behind as “best” gets better over time.

Internal benchmarking also supports an overall culture of continuous improvement. Every health care organization tracks a variety of data points but many fail to do anything with the results. Comparing current performance to past performance is a basic way to identify opportunities for formal QI studies—thereby integrating multiple examples of best practice in a robust quality program.

Consensus-based vs. Evidence-based

Best practice is what highly-regarded practitioners or organizations do. At base level, it’s a solution that has been field-tested with success in some settings and shows promise of being more widely applicable.

Similarly, “standard of care” is a consensus-based concept. And a moving target. While it has important implications, especially in litigation, its legal and medical definitions reflect a high degree of subjectivity. It’s unlikely that the standard of care is explicitly stated in any given situation. Practitioners rely instead on accepted practice wisdom, and community context.

These variants of “best” practice, not necessarily supported by data, represent consensus opinion based on experience and a minimum threshold to meet.

A higher level of best practice is research-validated and evidence-based. These practices reflect the results of rigorous methodology and well-executed, data-driven studies. The goal of evidence-based medicine is to bring the best available research into individual decision making. Evidence-based practice values quantitative studies over qualitative studies. It results in highly researched responses to a specific issue or problem, adding scientific rigor to the body of knowledge of an individual team or practitioner.

External benchmarking can represent evidence-based practice, or be a step toward it, depending on the nature and source of the benchmark.

Ranking “best” practice

The CDC, a well-known source for clinical guidelines, is explicit about the level of evidence supporting each recommendation they make with four clearly defined categories.
Good, Better, Best: Lessons from an Antiques Dealer

Albert Sack (1915-2011) wrote *Fine Points of Furniture: Good, Better, Best* in 1950 as a way to codify how antiques were assigned values. In his book, Sack explained how he, as a dealer, looked at a piece of furniture. He described the qualities of proportion, form, wood selection, and visual use of grain for the various period styles and illustrated these descriptions with examples that he classified as good, better and best.

The notion of good, better, best, continues to inform the world of antiques and is another example of the broad-based applicability of best practice, here using comparison to bring an evaluative standard to an otherwise subjective activity.
If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please reply to this message with “Unsubscribe” in the subject line or simply click on the following link: Unsubscribe.

AAAHC  
5250 Old Orchard Road  
Suite 200  
Skokie, Illinois 60077  
US

Read the VerticalResponse marketing policy.