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Watson, Kaitlyn E.; Dhaliwal, Kirnvir; Robertshaw, Sandra; Verdin, Nancy; Benterud, Eleanor

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# Consensus Recommendations for Sick Day Medication Guidance for People With Diabetes, Kidney, or Cardiovascular Disease: A Modified Delphi Process

*Kaitlyn E. Watson, Kirnvir Dhaliwal, Sandra Robertshaw, Nancy Verdin, Eleanor Benterud, Nicole Lamont, Kelsea M. Drall, Kerry McBrien, Maoliosa Donald, Ross T. Tsuyuki, David J.T. Campbell, Neesh Pannu, and Matthew T. James, on behalf of the PAUSE (Preventing Medication Complications During Acute Illness Through Symptom Evaluation and Sick Day Guidance) Medication Safety Advisory Panel*

**Rationale & Objective:** Sick day medication guidance (SDMG) involves withholding or adjusting specific medications in the setting of acute illnesses that could contribute to complications such as hypotension, acute kidney injury (AKI), or hypoglycemia. We sought to achieve consensus among clinical experts on recommendations for SDMG that could be studied in future intervention studies.

**Study Design:** A modified Delphi process following guidelines for conducting and reporting Delphi studies.

**Setting & Participants:** An international group of clinicians with expertise relevant to SDMG was recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. A scoping review of the literature was presented, followed by 3 sequential rounds of development, refinement, and voting on recommendations. Meetings were held virtually and structured to allow the participants to provide their input and rapidly prioritize and refine ideas.

**Outcome:** Opinions of participants were measured as the percentage who agreed with each recommendation, whereas consensus was defined as >75% agreement.

**Analytical Approach:** Quantitative data were summarized using counts and percentages. A qualitative content analysis was performed to capture the context of the discussion around recommendations and any additional considerations brought forward by participants.

**Results:** The final panel included 26 clinician participants from 4 countries and 10 clinical disciplines. Participants reached a consensus on 42 specific recommendations: 5 regarding the signs and symptoms accompanying volume depletion that should trigger SDMG; 6 regarding signs that should prompt urgent contact with a health care provider (including a reduced level of consciousness, severe vomiting, low blood pressure, presence of ketones, tachycardia, and fever); and 14 related to scenarios and strategies for patient self-management (including frequent glucose monitoring, checking ketones, fluid intake, and consumption of food to prevent hypoglycemia). There was consensus that renin-angiotensin system inhibitors, diuretics, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, sodium/glucose cotransporter 2 inhibitors, and metformin should be temporarily stopped. Participants recommended that insulin, sulfonylureas, and meglitinides be held only if blood glucose was low and that basal and bolus insulin be increased by 10%-20% if blood glucose was elevated. There was consensus on 6 recommendations related to the resumption of medications within 24-48 hours of the resolution of symptoms and the presence of normal patterns of eating and drinking.

**Limitations:** Participants were from high-income countries, predominantly Canada. Findings may not be generalizable to implementation in other settings.

**Conclusions:** A multidisciplinary panel of clinicians reached a consensus on recommendations for SDMG in the presence of signs and symptoms of volume depletion, as well as self-management strategies and medication instructions in this setting. These recommendations may inform the design of future trials of SDMG strategies.

*Complete author and article information (including a list of the members of the PAUSE Medication Safety Advisory Panel) provided before references.*

*Correspondence to M.T. James, (mjames@ucalgary.ca)*

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Sick day medication guidance (SDMG) has been recommended by several organizations to prevent potential complications that can arise when people who are taking medications for chronic conditions—including diabetes mellitus, kidney disease, and cardiovascular disease—experience an acute illness.[1-8] SDMG typically involves recommendations for withholding or adjusting specific medications in the setting of acute dehydrating illness that could contribute to complications such as hypotension, acute kidney injury (AKI), diabetic ketoacidosis, or hypoglycemia.[9-11] This guidance is intended to mitigate serious adverse medication complications in the setting of intercurrent illness that could contribute to death or hospitalization.[10,12-17]

A previous scoping review identified 74 documents pertaining to SDMG; however, the majority were guidelines or educational resources, and only 19 were primary research studies.[18] The review highlighted that there was little empirical evidence available to assess the effectiveness of approaches for implementing SDMG into practice, suggesting that further research to design and evaluate SDMG is required. However, there was also notable

**PLAIN-LANGUAGE SUMMARY**

Sick day medication guidance (SDMG) is intended to prevent adverse events during acute illness; however, varying recommendations exist. This study included 26 clinical experts in a modified Delphi process to develop consensus SDMG recommendations for patients with diabetes, kidney, or cardiovascular disease. Participants reached a consensus on 42 recommendations for SDMG, including recommendations on the signs and symptoms that should trigger SDMG, the signs that should prompt urgent contact with a health care provider, and scenarios and strategies for patient self-management. Eleven medication classes were recommended to be temporarily stopped or adjusted, and guidelines were provided for the resumption of medications. These consensus recommendations may inform the design of studies that examine the effectiveness of different strategies for implementing SDMG.

variation in the specific recommendations included in SDMG resources from different organizations. Before intervention studies can be designed to test the clinical effectiveness of SDMG, additional efforts are needed to establish consensus on the SDMG recommendations for inclusion in future intervention studies.

This study engaged expert clinicians in a modified Delphi process to generate consensus recommendations for SDMG that could be used by clinicians and researchers designing future intervention studies.

## Methods

### Study Design

We conducted a modified Delphi process that followed the guidelines for conducting and reporting Delphi studies.[19] The items presented in the modified Delphi process were informed by our scoping review of SDMG, a qualitative needs assessment that included primary care clinicians (ie, family physicians and pharmacists) and people with a chronic condition of interest, specifically diabetes mellitus type 2 (T2DM), chronic kidney disease (CKD), or cardiovascular disease. All session questions were developed and pilot-tested by team members and patient partners to ensure they were appropriate, clear, and comprehensive. Each round of the Delphi process was conducted virtually using a videoconferencing platform and lasted 90 minutes in duration. Ethics approval for this study was granted by the University of Alberta and University of Calgary Health Research Ethics Boards (ethics approval numbers: Pro00114350 and pSite-21-0024), and all participants provided informed consent.

### Recruitment of Participants

International stakeholders were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling and invited to participate in the modified Delphi process if they had clinical expertise in 1 or more content areas relevant to SDMG including primary care, pharmacy, nursing, and medical subspecialties (including general internal medicine, endocrinology/diabetology, cardiology/heart failure, and nephrology). Invitations were sent to authors of published primary research studies, guideline statements, reviews, commentaries, and patient or care provider educational resources that addressed the topic of SDMG, regardless of the findings, interpretation, or perspective provided in the publication. Additionally, snowball sampling was used, where invitees could also suggest other individuals to include who had expertise relevant to SDMG. Clinician participants received no financial compensation.

### Patient Engagement

Two patient partners (S.R. and N.V.) participated in the study as active (nonvoting) participants in all 3 rounds of the modified Delphi process. S.R. and N.V. assisted in structuring the research question and designing the Delphi rounds. In the first session, they presented their stories of lived experience managing medications in the setting of an acute illness to provide context and framing of the importance of the topic from a patient perspective. In subsequent sessions both patient partners participated in the small group sessions to help ground the discussions of SDMG in a patient-centered context. In all sessions, the patient partners contributed to the group discussion, were involved in the interpretation of this study's findings, and in the development of this article. Reporting of patient partner involvement was guided by the GRIPP2 checklist.[20]

### Structure of the Rounds

This modified Delphi process involved 3 rounds with discussion and voting (Fig 1). Round 1 began with stories about personal experiences with SDMG provided by the 2 patient partners, followed by a presentation of the findings from existing literature identified in the recent scoping review. Subsequently, a full group discussion of current knowledge about SDMG was held, followed by voting on an initial set of recommendations compiled from all resources identified by the scoping review.[18] The round 1 statements were categorized into 3 domains: (1) symptoms or signs of acute illness that should trigger SDMG (n = 15 items), (2) actions and self-management advice that should be included in SDMG (n = 18 items), and (3) patient groups who would qualify for SDMG and/or specific modifications (n = 14 items) (Fig 1). The participants rated (based on importance of individual items) their level of agreement on a 6-point Likert scale (from 0 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The responses were measured and reported to participants in real time using Mentimeter Interactive Software (Mentimeter AB) during the session. A summary document of the results from the first round was emailed to participants after the first session for further review before the second round.

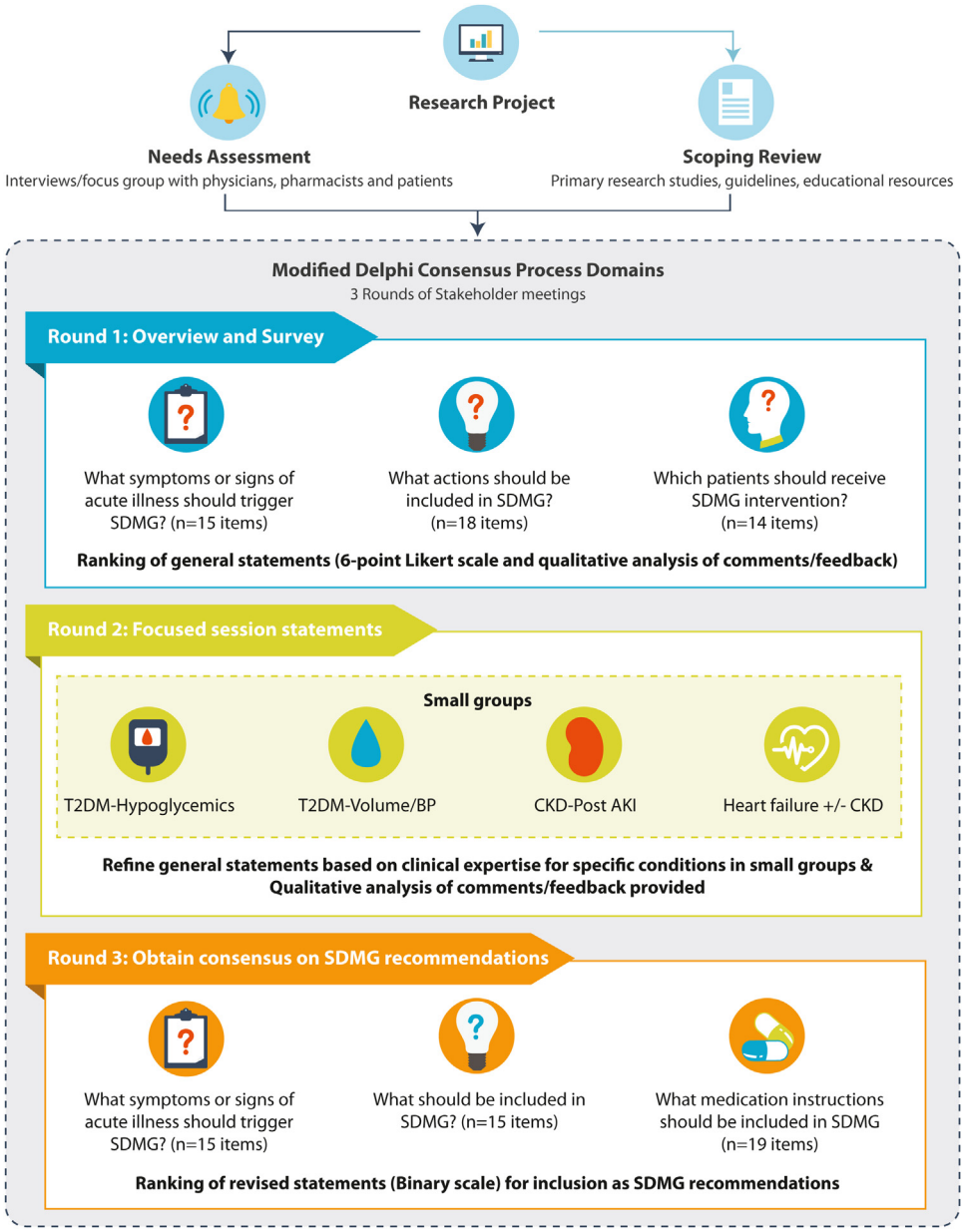


**Figure 1.** Modified Delphi process flow diagram. Abbreviations: AKI, acute kidney injury; BP, blood pressure; CKD, chronic kidney disease; SDMG, sick day medication guidance; T2DM, type 2 diabetes mellitus.

Round 2 involved small group discussions based on clinical expertise to further refine the round 1 statements in 4 clinical groups: (1) patients with T2DM using medications with the potential to cause hypoglycemia (sulfonylureas, meglitinides, insulin); (2) patients with T2DM using medications that may contribute to volume depletion or hypotension (sodium/glucose cotransporter 2 [SGLT2] inhibitors, glucagon-like peptide 1 receptor agonists [GLP-1RAs], diuretics, renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system [RAAS] inhibitors); (3) patients with CKD, AKI, or at risk of AKI; and (4) patients with heart failure (HF), with or without CKD. Each group produced revised statements that were subsequently collated and refined by the facilitators from each group into a final list of recommendations. Members of each group were provided with an email summary of their group's revised statement and were invited to provide any additional feedback to their group facilitator before finalizing the recommendations for final review in round 3.

In the final round (round 3), we presented the revised statements and accompanying contextual statements generated from the discussion to frame each group of recommendations. The participants then voted on their agreement with each recommendation on a binary scale (disagree or agree) using Mentimeter Interactive Software.

**Table 1.** Participant Characteristics

| | No. (%) |
|---|---|
| Clinical discipline | |
| Nephrologist | 8 (31%) |
| Endocrinologist | 4 (15%) |
| Pharmacist | 4 (15%) |
| Cardiologist | 2 (8%) |
| Diabetes educator | 2 (8%) |
| Primary care physician | 2 (8%) |
| General internist | 1 (4%) |
| Emergency physician | 1 (4%) |
| Nurse practitioner | 1 (4%) |
| Clinician researcher | 1 (4%) |
| Years of clinical practice | |
| <5 | 2 (8%) |
| 5-10 | 3 (12%) |
| 10-15 | 6 (23%) |
| 15-20 | 4 (15%) |
| >20 | 11 (42%) |
| Country | |
| Canada | 19 (73%) |
| United Kingdom | 4 (15%) |
| United States | 2 (8%) |
| Australia | 1 (4%) |
| Type of practice[a] | |
| Outpatient clinic | 19 (73%) |
| Hospital | 15 (58%) |
| Primary care | 3 (12%) |
| Community pharmacy | 1 (4%) |
| Age | |
| 31-45 y | 7 (27%) |
| 46-55 y | 11 (42%) |
| 56-65 y | 8 (31%) |
| Female sex | 13 (50%) |
| Self-reported ethnicity | |
| Caucasian/White | 14 (54%) |
| Visible minority | 8 (31%) |
| Other | 2 (8%) |
| Prefer not to answer | 2 (8%) |
| Frequency of SDMG | |
| Never | 1 (4%) |
| Rarely | 6 (23%) |
| Sometimes | 10 (38%) |
| Frequently | 7 (27%) |
| Always | 2 (8%) |
| Population served | |
| 30,000-99,999 | 1 (4%) |
| 100,000-499,999 | 4 (15%) |
| 500,000-999,999 | 4 (15%) |
| ≥1,000,000 | 17 (65%) |

N = 26. Abbreviation: SDMG, sick day medication guidance.
[a]Total does not sum to 26 because multiple answers were possible.

The final recommendations were categorized into 3 domains (Fig 1): (1) what symptoms or signs of acute illness should trigger SDMG? (n = 15 items); (2) what clinical actions should be included in SDMG? (n = 15 items); and (3) what medication instructions should be included in SDMG? (n = 19 items). A summary document of the results from the final round were emailed to all participants after the session accompanied by a survey to provide anonymous feedback on their satisfaction with the process and their perception of whether they felt their opinions were heard during the process.

### Data Analysis

Recommendations from rounds 1 and 3 were voted on, and agreement was measured as the percentage of voting participants who agreed with each individual statement. The participants were able to abstain from voting on the items they deemed outside of their area of clinical expertise. The threshold for consensus was prespecified at 75% agreement for each statement. Qualitative content analysis was also performed to capture the context around the recommendations developed and the accompanying discussion by participants. Data were obtained from reviewing the session transcripts, the comments typed in the videoconferencing chat box, and the field notes collected by 3 research coordinators attending the sessions. The data were coded using descriptive and pattern coding into categories and high-level themes.

## Results

### Participants

From 60 clinicians who were sent an invitation to participate, a total of 26 participated in the modified Delphi process, representing 10 clinical areas of expertise and 4 countries, including Canada, the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom (Table 1; Item S1). The participants worked in various practice settings including outpatient specialty clinics, hospitals, primary care clinics, and community pharmacies. There were 13 male and 13 female participants, with many (n = 11) having more than 2 decades of clinical experience. Nine participants stated that they provide SDMG frequently or always to their patients, 10 stated that they only sometimes provide SDMG, and 7 said they rarely or never provide SDMG.

### Round One

Forty-seven recommendations in total were initially put forward to the participants in the first round, and 30 statements (64%) reached consensus (75% or more of the participants voting in agreement—ie, "slightly agree" to "strongly agree") (Item S2). The participants agreed (slightly or strongly) with 12 of the 15 statements related to "What symptoms or signs of acute illness should trigger SDMG?," 6 of the 18 statements related to "What actions should be included in SDMG?," and 12 of the 14 statements related to "Which patients should receive SDMG intervention?"

There were 3 main themes identified from the discussion in round 1 including (1) the lack of evidence supporting SDMG, (2) the effectiveness of current SDMG

**Box 1.** Round 1 Themes With Illustrative Quotations

**Level of evidence to support SDMG**
- "So I just think we've got to be super careful that this is not exactly a robust area of evidence." (Participant 25)
- "Not to say you can't stop medicines in the context of individual assessment, but real caution about systematic rollout of sick day guidance without a robust evidence base." (Participant 22)

**Effectiveness of current SDMG strategies**
- "I think that there's more than just about the medications and the context, and I've been thinking about what I say to individual patients and how much I struggle to get the nuance right for an individual, and then I'll say something completely different to the next person that comes into clinic." (Participant 2)
- "Generating some parameters or guidance that we might design studies to evaluate whether these strategies are effective and safe rather than … try to synthesize this limited evidence right now to make any kind of clinical recommendations would not be the direction we are intending to go in." (Participant 1)

**Challenges with defining sick days**
- "But I know for us it was just, how do you tell people who this pertains to? You know, it's not just the common cold, it's not just, oh I've got a runny nose—so in our tools we really tried to identify when you are at risk at dehydration, and it wasn't even that, it was more like when you were at risk of dehydration, or when you are dehydrated and cannot replace your fluids because technically if you are, you know, at risk of dehydration, but you are able to replenish then you can continue your medications—you aren't dehydrated then, right. So, anyway, even the term 'sick day' was actually something that we got stuck on to tell people." (Participant 19)
- "And it's partly about when to stop something, what to stop, but also what to continue and how to make sure that somebody doesn't just think about the medications, but then thinks about 'Well, how do I decide whenever I'm sick enough?' or 'It's too complex that I need to ask for advice.'" (Participant 2)

strategies, and (3) the challenges for patients identifying sick days and appropriate responses. These themes and representative quotes are highlighted in Box 1. The participants emphasized that recommendations for SDMG need to be placed in the context of individual patient needs and abilities, and that recommendations should be used to design interventions for future research rather than used as guidelines for current clinical practice. In the absence of clinical evidence that interventions for SDMG can prevent harm, participants generally expressed a preference for more conservative general recommendations where they perceived greater potential for benefit over harm.

## Round 2

Three overarching themes emerged from the discussions held within the 4 small group sessions: (1) distinguishing appropriate situations for self-management versus those needing health care provider support, (2) triaging and clarifying symptoms to guide SDMG, and (3) the need for refinement of parameters for SDMG recommendations.

### *Theme 1: Self-Management Versus Health Care Provider Support*

The groups identified that SDMG should be centered on patient self-management but provided in tandem with support from their health care provider (HCP). Often there can be limited support immediately available when patients are sick (eg, overnight, weekends, etc), so SDMG could be designed for patients and their care partners to self-manage their sick days. It was also acknowledged this may not work for all patients, and mechanisms for collaboration and oversight from their HCPs are still essential in providing SDMG. The need for individualizing SDMG to the patients and their health literacy was also stressed as important, as illustrated in this quote from participant 12:

> Self-management is always appropriate as there is limited support and care available for patients when sick, but it should be provided in tandem with the patient trying to engage with their HCP (pharmacists might be the easiest to get in contact with during an acute illness). Also, need to consider patient's capabilities, cognitive function, support network, and health literacy to individualize and implement self-management.

### *Theme 2: Triaging and Clarifying Symptoms*

All the groups highlighted that focusing SDMG on symptoms and signs of volume depletion was appropriate. However, it was identified that not all SDMG monitoring recommendations listed would apply to all patients; it should be tailored to the patients' chronic condition and the extent to which they could conduct monitoring (eg, weight, blood pressure, ketones, blood glucose, etc). One group identified that signs and symptoms could be presented as a traffic light or triage approach. For mild symptoms, patients could self-manage with SDMG and for severe symptoms be informed about when to contact emergency care (eg, syncope), as highlighted in a comment from participant 7:

> So, green light would suggest that you can continue and that you are doing well. Yellow might be alerting a health care provider, but not necessarily, it could be a pharmacist or primary care provider, and red-light symptoms would prompt an emergency department visit or calling 911.

The discussions accentuated the need to emphasize "new or worsening" signs and symptoms because many patients can experience some of these symptoms as side

**Box 2.** Delphi Round 3 Contextual Statements

**Domain 1: What symptoms or signs of acute illness should trigger SDMG?**
*Context:* Symptoms and signs of acute illness that trigger SDMG should be readily understandable by patients (or caregivers) and should help patients identify situations when they are vulnerable or may be developing volume depletion or dehydration in the community. Patients with chronic disease may already experience some degree of these symptoms due to underlying chronic conditions, and some of these symptoms may occur after taking their medications (eg, nausea and satiety after taking a GLP-1RA). Guidance should thus emphasize new or worsening of symptoms or signs, particularly when intake or fluids may not be keeping up with losses. We acknowledge that not all recommendations will apply to all patients. For example, changes in weight, blood pressure, blood glucose, and ketones would only be applicable to those who monitor these at home.

**Domain 2: What clinical actions should be included in SDMG?**
*Context:* A graded approach can be used to guide the intensity of support provided for sick day guidance, which may include self-management as well as assistance provided to a patient at home from a health care provider. Self-management should be provided in tandem with education and the ability for patients to engage with their health care providers. The ability to self-manage should be guided by a patient's capabilities, cognitive function, support network, and health literacy. Patients can self-manage if they feel capable, have support, and feel able to cope with monitoring and keeping up with fluid intake (green light) or adjusting insulin in response to blood glucose. Patients who are not coping or who develop severe signs or symptoms of hypovolemia or those related to heart failure/volume overload or hyperglycemia while holding medications (red light) should seek medical assistance.

**Domain 3: What medication instructions should be included in SDMG?**
*Context:* SDMG includes instructions for patients to temporarily stop medications for a short period of time. This guidance requires appropriate education and tools to allow patients or their caregivers to identify the appropriate medications to be stopped during acute illness. These approaches should be co-designed and developed with patients and are beyond the scope of this modified Delphi process. However, it should be made clear that sick day medication is intended only to temporarily stop medications during acute illness and that it is important to resume medications for these chronic conditions when an illness has resolved.

Abbreviations: GLP-1RA, glucagon-like peptide 1 receptor agonist; SDMG, sick day medication guidance.

effects of their medications or as part of their chronic condition. Participant 5 noted,

> So that really needs to be clear in the guidance that this was a change or worsening and that this applies to all the symptoms, vomiting and diarrhea as well, because those were sometimes common symptoms that these patients would experience at baseline.

### *Theme 3: Refining Parameters of SDMG Recommendations*

Each group discussed areas for refinement of specific SDMG recommendations (eg, signs and symptoms, medications, and appropriate time frames). The participants recognized the need for SDMG interventions to be further studied for effectiveness, as well as implementation strategies and education to be tailored for patients and their care partners. Although they are important, some key questions were deemed beyond the scope of this modified Delphi process, such as how to ensure patients correctly identify which medications they need to temporarily stop or resume.

## Round 3

The revised contextual statements and list of recommendations created after the synthesis of the round 2 discussion are shown in Box 2 and Table 2, respectively, categorized under 3 domains: (1) what signs and symptoms should trigger SDMG? (2) what clinical actions should be included in SDMG? and (3) what medications should be included in SDMG? Forty-nine recommendations in total were put forward to the participants in the final round, and 42 (86%) of them reached consensus (>75% of voting participants agreeing with the recommendation).

### *Domain 1: Signs and Symptoms to Trigger SDMG*

Recommendations that were agreed on addressed triaging of responses based on severity of signs and symptoms and a patient's ability to replace his or her fluids (Table 2; Item S3). For example, the participants recommended that vomiting resulting in significant fluid loss should trigger a SDMG intervention but that greater than 4 episodes of vomiting in 12 hours or a patient's inability to keep fluids down should prompt contact with the patient's HCP.

### *Domain 2: Clinical Actions That Should be Included in SDMG*

The participants agreed that the SDMG was appropriate for patient (or caregiver) self-management when there is an absence of severe symptoms, the patient is competent or the patient (or caregiver) feels capable of coping, and the patient can keep up his or her fluid intake. Alternatively, the participants agreed that patients not coping with self-management, with symptoms that have not resolved after 72 hours, or who are unable to keep fluids down should seek assistance and support from their HCP. The participants agreed that SDMG should only be used for temporary self-management until symptoms resolve or for a maximum of 72 hours, whichever comes first. This was in recognition

**Table 2.** Delphi Round 3 Recommendat ions and Voting Results

| Recommendation | Voting Results[a] |
|---|---|
| **Domain 1: What symptoms or signs of acute illness should trigger SDMG?** | |
| One or more of the following symptoms or signs of volume depletion, when new or more frequent or severe than usual, can be considered triggers to initiate SDMG: | |
| Vomiting or diarrhea, resulting in significant fluid losses | 25/25 (100%) |
| Anorexia or nausea, resulting in significant decrease in fluid intake | 22/25 (88%) |
| New lightheadedness, dizziness, or fainting, particularly with sitting or standing up | 22//25 (88%) |
| Decreased weight (3 kg in 2 d) | 20/24 (83%) |
| Decreased urine output | 18/24 (75%) |
| New weakness, lethargy, or fatigue | 12/24 (50%)[b] |
| Increased thirst | 7/25 (28%)[b] |
| New dry mouth, lips, or eyes | 2/24 (8%)[b] |
| The following symptoms and signs should be considered severe enough to prompt contact with HCP: | |
| Reduced level of consciousness or new confusion | 25/25 (100%) |
| Vomiting >4 times in 12 h or cannot keep fluids down | 24/25 (96%) |
| Low BP (SBP <80 mm Hg; drop of 20 mm Hg in SBP or 10 mm Hg in DBP) | 23/25 (92%) |
| Moderate or high ketones (for patients taking SGLT2i or insulin) | 21/23 (91%) |
| Increased heart rate (increase by 30 bpm) | 19/24 (79%) |
| Fever (temperature >38 °C (101 °F) on 2 measurements) | 18/24 (75%) |
| Extreme thirst | 7/24 (29%)[b] |
| **Domain 2: What clinical actions should be included in SDMG?** | |
| Self-management is appropriate when: | |
| There is an absence of severe symptoms. | 24/25 (96%) |
| Patients feel they are able to cope. | 23/25 (92%) |
| Patients can keep up with their fluid intake. | 21/24 (88%) |
| Assistance/support from HCP should be sought when: | |
| Patients feel they are not coping. | 25/25 (100%) |
| Signs and symptoms have not resolved within 72 h. | 25/25 (100%) |
| Patients cannot keep up with intake of foods or fluids. | 24/24 (100%) |
| Patients have recurrent low blood glucose readings. | 24/25 (96%) |
| Patients experience significant increase in blood glucose not coming down with self-adjustment after 24 h. | 24/25 (96%) |
| 911, emergency, or urgent care should be sought for: | |
| Difficulty or rapid breathing | 24/24 (100%) |
| Reduced level of consciousness or new confusion | 23/24 (96%) |
| Fainting or falls | 17/24 (71%)[b] |
| SDMG should include the following instructions to reverse volume depletion or dehydration and avoid hypoglycemia or ketoacidosis: | |
| Patients receiving insulin should receive instructions for more frequent self-monitoring of blood glucose (every 4-6 h) while awake and for the duration of symptoms. | 24/24 (100%) |
| Patients receiving SGLT2i, insulin, or on ketogenic diets should check ketones. | 19/20 (95%) |
| Increase fluid intake with limited caffeine and consider electrolyte replacement solutions. | 22/24 (92%) |
| Patients who took their daily dose of sulfonylurea should be instructed to try to eat foods to prevent low blood glucose until the effect of the medication has worn off (~12-24 h). | 18/23 (78%) |
| **Domain 3: What medication instructions should be included in SDMG?** | |
| SDMG should include instructions to temporarily stop these medications: | |
| SGLT2i (eg, empagliflozin) | 22/23 (96%) |
| If blood glucose low, hold insulin/sulfonylurea/meglitinide until blood glucose recovers | 22/23 (96%) |
| NSAIDs | 21/22 (95%) |
| Potassium-sparing diuretics (eg, amiloride, spironolactone) | 18/19 (95%) |
| Loop diuretics (eg, furosemide) | 18/19 (95%) |
| ACEI/ARBs (eg, perindopril, candesartan) | 18/20 (90%) |
| Thiazides/thiazide-like diuretics (eg, HCTZ, indapamide) | 18/20 (90%) |
| ARNI (sacubitril/valsartan) | 15/17 (88%) |
| If blood glucose more elevated than usual, empirical 10%-20% increase in basal and bolus insulin doses (if unsuccessful at lowering blood glucose, contact HCP) | 20/23 (87%) |
| Metformin | 19/22 (86%) |

*(Continued)*

**Table 2 (Cont'd).** Delphi Round 3 Recommendat ions and Voting Results

| Recommendation | Voting Results[a] |
|---|---|
| Direct renin inhibitors (aliskiren) | 14/17 (82%) |
| GLP-1RAs (eg, liraglutide) | 12/21 (57%)[b] |
| Sedative medications (eg, benzodiazepines, Z drugs) | 8/17 (47%)[b] |
| For medication that can be temporarily stopped, stop for: | |
| Up to 3 days | 24/24 (100%) |
| Until signs and symptoms have resolved | 21/24 (88%) |
| Resuming medications: | |
| For medications that can cause hypoglycemia, they should be resumed at usual doses as soon as symptoms improve and normal eating and drinking resume. | 23/23 (100%) |
| Seek assistance from HCP about their medications when symptoms last >72 h. | 23/23 (100%) |
| For medications that are volume depleting, they should be resumed at usual doses with 24-48 h or eating and drinking normally. | 21/22 (95%) |
| Other than those immediately above, medications should be resumed at usually doses within 24-48 h of eating and drinking normally. | 19/20 (95%) |

Abbreviations: ACEI/ARBs, angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors/angiotensin II receptor blockers; ARNI, angiotensin receptor neprilysin inhibitor; BP, blood pressure; DBP, diastolic blood pressure; GLP-1RA, glucagon-like peptide 1 receptor agonist; HCP, health care provider; HCTZ, hydrochlorothiazide; NSAIDs, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs; SBP, systolic blood pressure; SDMG, sick day medication guidance; SGLT2i, sodium/glucose cotransporter 2 inhibitor.
[a]Reported as number agreed/number responded (%). Denominator varies, as participants were allowed to abstain from voting on items they deemed outside their expertise. Consensus was prespecified as ≥75% agreement.
[b]Item did not achieve consensus.

that even mild symptoms that last longer than 72 hours should involve management and support from the patient's HCP. Additionally, the participants agreed that patients with T2DM who have major changes in their blood glucose levels should contact their HCP for advice.

### Domain 3: Specific Medication Instructions for SDMG

Out of the 13 recommendations put forward to the participants, 11 medication instruction recommendations achieved consensus for inclusion as part of SDMG. Participants agreed with recommendations for SDMG related to withholding SGLT2 inhibitor and metformin, adjusting insulin depending on blood glucose and ketones, and withholding sulfonylurea/meglitinide only if blood glucose is low and until it recovers. Participants agreed with including recommendations to withhold angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors/angiotensin II receptor blockers (ACEI/ARBs), angiotensin receptor-neprilysin inhibitor (ARNI), diuretics (loop, thiazides, and potassium sparing), direct renin inhibitors, and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) as part of SDMG.

### Delphi Process Evaluation

From the 26 participants, 19 responded to the evaluation survey after completion of the Delphi process. All stated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the process, and 17 stated they felt the process identified valuable SDMG recommendations to be evaluated in future studies.

## Discussion

This modified Delphi process involved an international panel of clinicians from 4 countries and 10 clinical disciplines. The participants reached consensus on 42 recommendations that can be incorporated into interventions for testing in future clinical trials of SDMG. These included 5 recommendations for signs and symptoms of volume depletion that should trigger SDMG, 6 severe signs that should prompt contact with a HCP (reduced level of consciousness, severe vomiting, low blood pressure, presence of ketones, tachycardia, and fever), and 14 recommendations related to appropriate scenarios and strategies for patient self-management (including frequent glucose monitoring, checking ketones, fluid intake, and consumption of food to prevent hypoglycemia).

The participants also reached consensus on recommendations related to withholding renin-angiotensin system inhibitors, diuretics, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories, SGLT2 inhibitors, and metformin, and that insulin, sulfonylureas, meglitinides should be held only if blood glucose is low whereas a 10% to 20% increase in basal and bolus insulin should be made if blood glucose was high. There were 6 recommendations to guide resumption of medications within 24-48 hours of resolution of symptoms and when eating and drinking normally. Achieving consensus on these clinical recommendations is a fundamental first step to inform the design of consistent and acceptable SDMG interventions for patients with diabetes, kidney disease, or cardiovascular disease experiencing acute dehydrating illnesses. However, further research is required to design the best implementation strategies to support uptake of these recommendations within the setting of clinical care and patient self-management.

This modified Delphi process builds upon our previous scoping review, where we identified several areas of inconsistences in SDMG between organizations and published resources.[18] In particular, the existing resources provide

variable guidance on the use of antihyperglycemic medications and insulin in the setting of intercurrent illness, with some recommending patients continue these medicines, others recommending to stop them, and some suggesting to continue or stop according to blood glucose levels.[1,3,4,8,21-32] Our panel was able to come to consensus in this area and agreed with the recommendations that "if blood glucose levels are low, hold insulin/sulfonylurea/meglitinide until blood glucose levels recover" and that "if blood glucose is more elevated than usual, an empiric 10-20% increase in basal and bolus insulin doses [is recommended]." Furthermore, although some recent resources for SDMG identified GLP-1RAs[3,4,26-29,31-34] and sedative medications as medicines to withhold on sick days, our panel did not reach consensus to include these medications in recommendations because of the long half-lives of most GLP-1RAs, the risk of adverse events with rapid withdrawal of sedative agents, and their not being expected to worsen volume depletion during an acute dehydrating illness.

A strength of this modified Delphi process includes the participation of a diverse group of international clinicians with relevant multidisciplinary expertise and experience with development of educational resources for SDMG. However, it is possible that the use of snowball recruitment could have resulted in selection of a more like-minded group of participants. Reassuringly, the participants included a mix of clinicians who provided SDMG rarely as well as frequently, suggesting inclusion of individuals with differing practice behaviors.

Due to the travel restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, this modified Delphi process was undertaken virtually using a videoconferencing platform and real-time feedback through the Mentimeter Interactive Software. To counter the challenges that a virtual environment could potentially pose, we scheduled time within each of the 3 rounds for questions, discussion, and small group sessions to ensure all voices had an opportunity to be heard and incorporated into the recommendations.

This modified Delphi process focused specifically on SDMG for adults, and thus guidance or inference to pediatric settings was beyond the scope of the study. The participants also recognized that the management of type 1 diabetes mellitus is associated with a higher risk of diabetic ketoacidosis and requires individualized approaches to its management, and that advice should be given early and directly from a patient's HCP. Therefore, development of recommendations specific to this population were not included in this process.

Additionally, this modified Delphi process was designed to focus on clinical content for inclusion in SDMG and recommendations for implementation strategies, and thus modes of delivery to patients and HCPs were considered outside the scope of the study. Further steps are required to develop resources and strategies to effectively communicate these recommendations to patients.

Finally, the participants were from high-income countries and most were from Canada, so the findings may not necessarily be generalizable to other settings, particularly low- and middle-income countries.

Our modified Delphi process helps resolve some of the uncertainty and inconsistencies identified from various published studies and resources for SDMG. The recommendations that we developed and achieved consensus on may inform the design of interventions to test the effectiveness of SDMG strategies. However, further research will be required to design and test effective strategies to implement these recommendations into patient care.

Previous research has reported that traditional approaches to delivering SDMG are prone to patient error in identifying the symptoms that should trigger SDMG and recognizing the appropriate medications to adjust.[35] Future research should test educational strategies, support mechanism, and self-management tools to ensure interventions for SDMG can implement these recommendations as intended.

For practicing clinicians, we recognize that the findings of this study may help guide their support to people with SDMG where they deem it appropriate. However, these recommendations are not intended to form general treatment recommendations or guidelines for current clinical practice; rather, they have instead been proposed to promote a consistent and acceptable set of interventions for further implementation and evaluation to close the evidence gap around the effectiveness of SDMG in community settings.

In conclusion, we brought together a multidisciplinary international panel of experts and used a systematic process to establish consensus on specific recommendations for signs and symptoms that should trigger SDMG, scenarios and strategies for self-management versus HCP responses to sick days, and guidance on withdrawal, adjustment, and resumption of medications during and after sick days. These recommendations can be used to identify information for inclusion in clinician- and patient-facing resources and inform future studies to investigate the effectiveness of SDMG within clinical care and patient self-management strategies.

## Supplementary Material

### Supplementary File (PDF)

**Item S1:** Relationships between disciplines, professions, and countries of participants in the Delphi process.

**Item S2:** Modified Delphi process round 1 results.

**Item S3:** Modified Delphi process round 3 results.

## Article Information

**Members of the PAUSE Medication Safety Advisory Panel:** Bibiana Cujec, University of Alberta, Canada; David Campbell, University of Calgary, Canada; David Dyjur, Alberta Health Services, Canada; Edward Siew, Vanderbilt University Medical Centre, United States; Eddy Lang, Alberta Health Services, Canada; Jane de Lemos, Vancouver Coastal Health Research Institute, University of British Columbia, Canada; Jay L. Koyner, University of Chicago, United States; Julie McKeen, University of Calgary, Canada; Justin Ezekowitz, University of Alberta, Canada; Kaitlyn Watson, University of Alberta, Canada; Kerry Porter,

Queensland Health, Australia; Maeve O'Beirne, University of Calgary, Canada; Maoliosa Donald, University of Calgary, Canada; Matthew James, University of Calgary, Canada; Meghan J. Ho, University of British Columbia, Canada; Neesh Pannu, University of Alberta, Canada; Nicholas Selby, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom; Rhonda Roedler, Alberta Health Services, Canada; Roseanne O. Yeung, University of Alberta, Canada; Ross Tsuyuki, University of Alberta, Canada; Samuel Silver, Queens University, Canada; Samira Bell, University of Dundee, United Kingdom; Simon Sawhney, University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom; Susie Jin, Clinical Community Pharmacist, Ontario, Canada; Tom Blakeman, University of Manchester, United Kingdom; Vicky Parkins, University of Calgary, Canada.

**Authors' Full Names and Academic Degrees:** Kaitlyn E. Watson, BPharm (Hons), PhD, Kirnvir Dhaliwal RN, MN, PhD, Sandra Robertshaw, Nancy Verdin, Eleanor Benterud RN, MN, Nicole Lamont MBT, BHSc, Kelsea M. Drall, MSc, Kerry McBrien, MD, MPH, Maoliosa Donald, PhD, BScPT, Ross T. Tsuyuki, BSc(Pharm), PharmD, MSc, David J.T. Campbell, MD, MSc, PhD, Neesh Pannu MD, SM, and Matthew T. James, MD, PhD.

**Authors' Affiliations:** Patient partner (SR, NV), Department of Family Medicine (KM, MD), Department of Community Health Sciences (KM, MD, DJTC, MTJ), Department of Cardiac Sciences (DJTC), and Department of Medicine (MD, DJTC, MTJ, EB, NL, KD), Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; and Division of Nephrology (KMD), EPICORE Centre (RTT, KEW), Department of Medicine (NP), and Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry (NP), University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

**Additional Information:** ORCiDs are 0000-0001-6617-9398 (KEW), 0000-0003-3480-1415 (KD), 0000-0001-5653-6558 (EB), 0000-0002-6024-7828 (KM), 0000-0002-8484-8361 (MD), 0000-0002-3724-598X (RTT), 0000-0002-5570-3630 (DJTC), 0000-0002-1876-3917 (MTJ).

**Address for Correspondence:** Matthew T. James, MD, PhD, FRCPC, Departments of Medicine and Community Health Sciences, Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, 3280 Hospital Dr NW, Calgary, AB T2N 4Z6, Canada. Email: mjames@ucalgary.ca

**Authors' Contributions:** Conceived and designed the study: KEW, EB, RTT, DJTC, NP, MTJ; contributed to study design: SR, NV, NL, KMD, KM, MD; co-facilitated the modified Delphi sessions: KEW, KD, SR, NV, KMD, DJTC, NP, MTJ; contributed to data collection and synthesis: KEW, NL, EB, KD, KMD, MD, RTT, DJTC, NP, MTJ. Each author contributed important intellectual content during manuscript drafting or revision and agrees to be personally accountable for the individual's own contributions and to ensure that questions pertaining to the accuracy or integrity of any portion of the work, even one in which the author was not directly involved, are appropriately investigated and resolved, including with documentation in the literature if appropriate.

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