Introduction

As part of the regular and ongoing review of evidence synthesis processes used in the PEN® system, in June 2015, the PEN® Content team made the unanimous decision to explore adopting the GRADE approach to developing practice recommendations. An intensive training session was undertaken by members of the PEN® content team in September 2015 and the PEN® GRADE process was articulated in the ensuing months. The PEN® GRADE process (Figure 1) relies heavily on the GRADE Handbook developed by the Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) Working Group and PEN® authors are encouraged to review relevant sections of the handbook for further details:
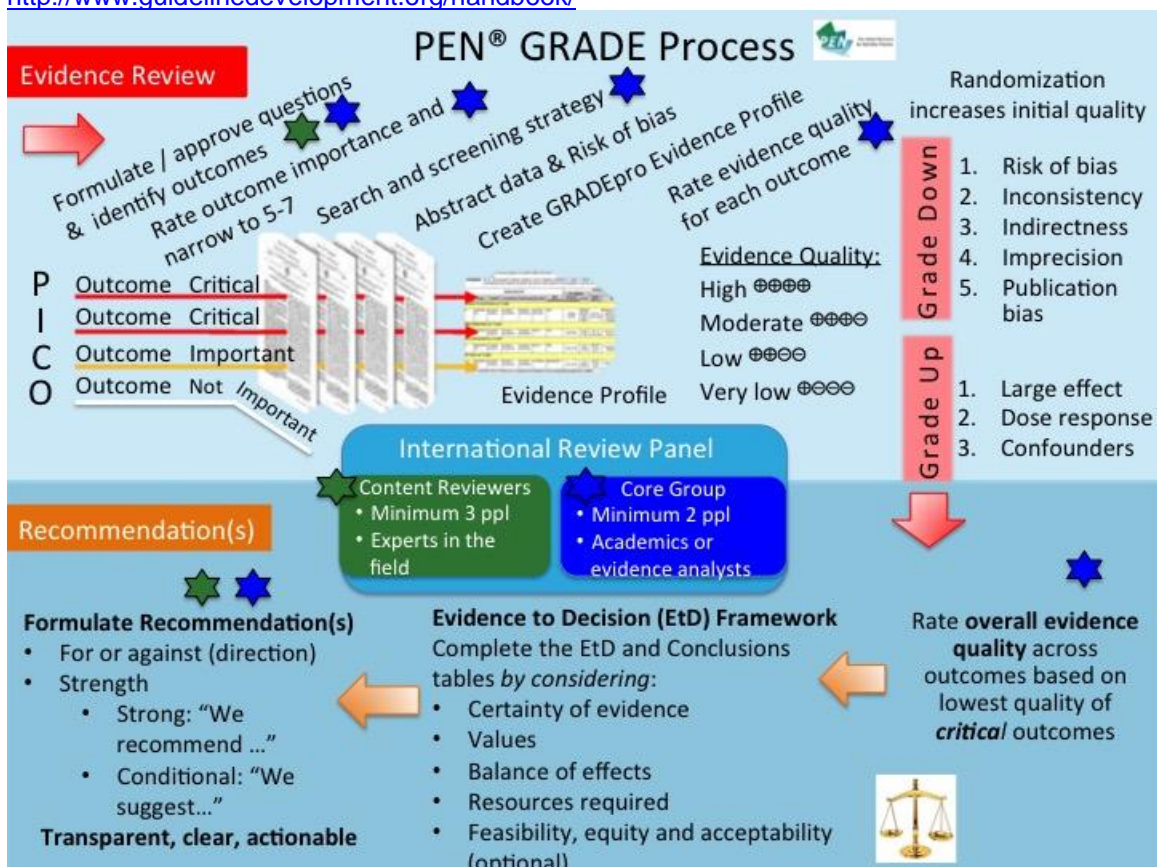http://www.guidelinedevelopment.org/handbook/

Figure 1: PEN® GRADE Process (Adapted from GRADE meeting, Edinburgh 2009).

The PEN® GRADE process is comprised of 6 steps:
1. Develop the practice questions and outcomes of interest
2. Search the literature using a hierarchal approach to identify evidence
3. Summarize and assess the evidence for each outcome for an intervention or risk factor
4. Assess the quality of evidence for each outcome across studies – create an Evidence Profile Table
5. Summarize the evidence for all important factors to decision making (e.g. benefits and harms, values, feasibility, equity, acceptability, resources) – complete the Evidence to Decision Framework
6. Formulate the recommendation noting the strength of the recommendation and the quality of evidence upon which it is based.

Related Tools, Resources and Learning Materials
Overview of the GRADE Approach in Guideline Development
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVOtk3TdkMo