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Clinical Practice Guidelines and Consensus Statements in Oncology; an Assessment of their Methodological Quality

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Background

- Consensus statements and clinical practice guidelines are widely used in oncology to improve patients care.^{1, 2, 3}
- Consensus statements and clinical practice guidelines serve a similar purpose, but have subtle differences in definition.
 - A consensus statement is a statement developed by an independent panel of experts, usually multidisciplinary, convened to review the research literature in an evidence-based manner for the purpose of advancing the understanding of an issue, procedure or method.⁴
 - A clinical practice guideline is a statement that includes recommendations intended to optimize patient care that is informed by a systematic review of evidence and an assessment of the benefits and harms of alternative options.⁵
- Multiple 'guidelines for guidelines' such as AGREE II have been developed to ensure standards for clinical practice guidelines.⁶
- We evaluated the methodological quality of both consensus statements and clinical practice guidelines published in three oncology specific journals.

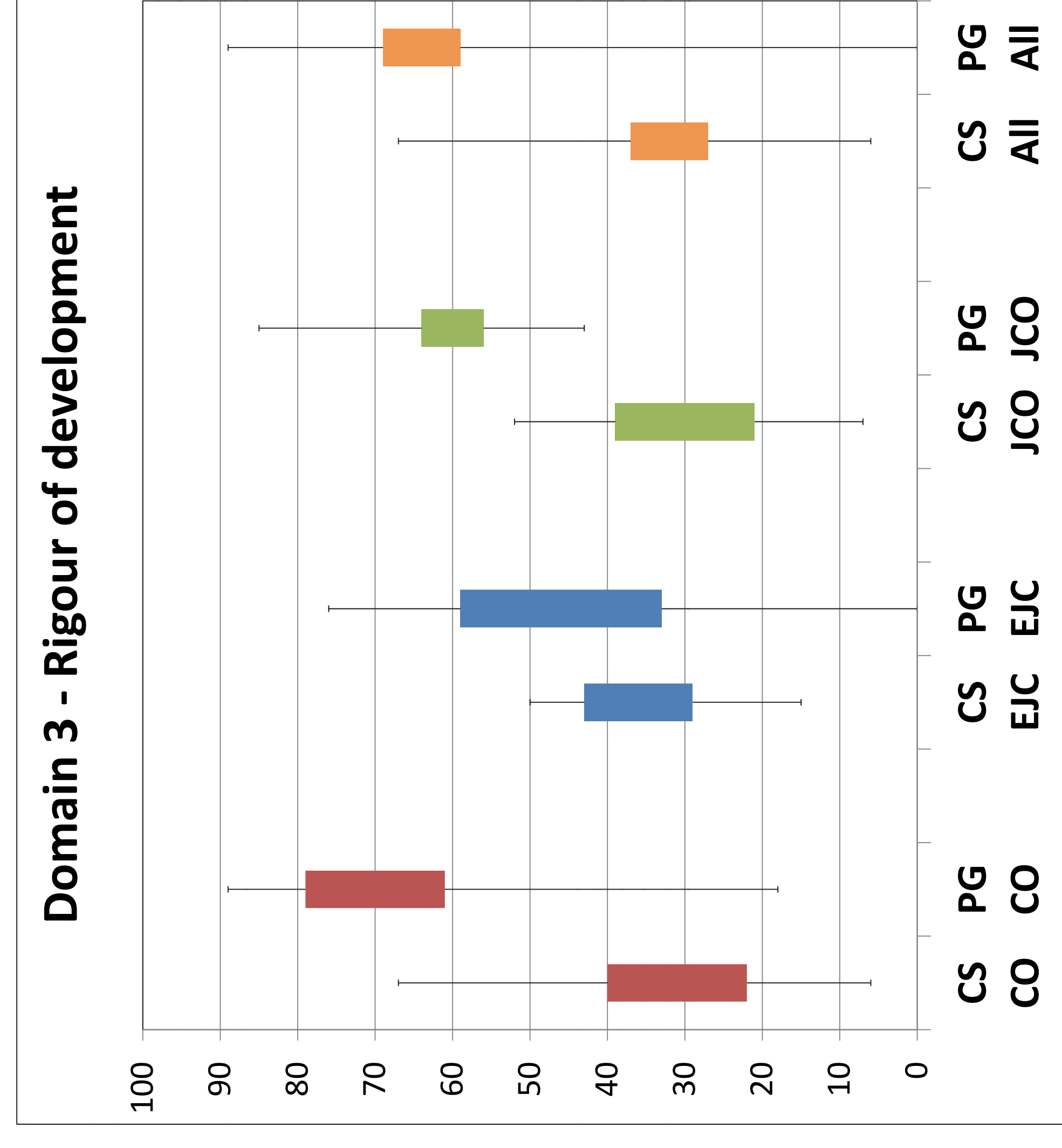
Methods

- We searched three geographically diverse oncology specific journals for consensus statements or guidelines and practice guidelines published from January 2005 to September 2013.
- The journals searched were
 - Current Oncology (CO) (Canada)
 - European Journal of Cancer (EJC)
 - Journal of Clinical Oncology (JCO) (USA)
- We used each journal's own website search tool to identify documents with the following terms in the title;
 - Consensus, Consensus guideline, Consensus statement, Clinical practice guideline, Practice guideline, Medical guideline
- We used the AGREE II tool domains
 - 3 – rigour of development
 - 6 – editorial independence – to appraise these aspects of the guidance document
- We developed eight additional items that we thought important in developing methodologically sound guidance documents, based on the Institute of Medicine standards for developing trustworthy guidelines and author guidance criteria published by the JCO.

Results

101 guidance documents were published over the eight year period
 34 Consensus statements, 67 Practice guidelines
 Current Oncology published 14 Consensus statements, 24 Practice guidelines
 European Journal of Cancer published 9 Consensus statements, 13 Practice guidelines
 Journal of Clinical Oncology published 11 Consensus statements, 30 Practice guidelines

AGREE II Scores



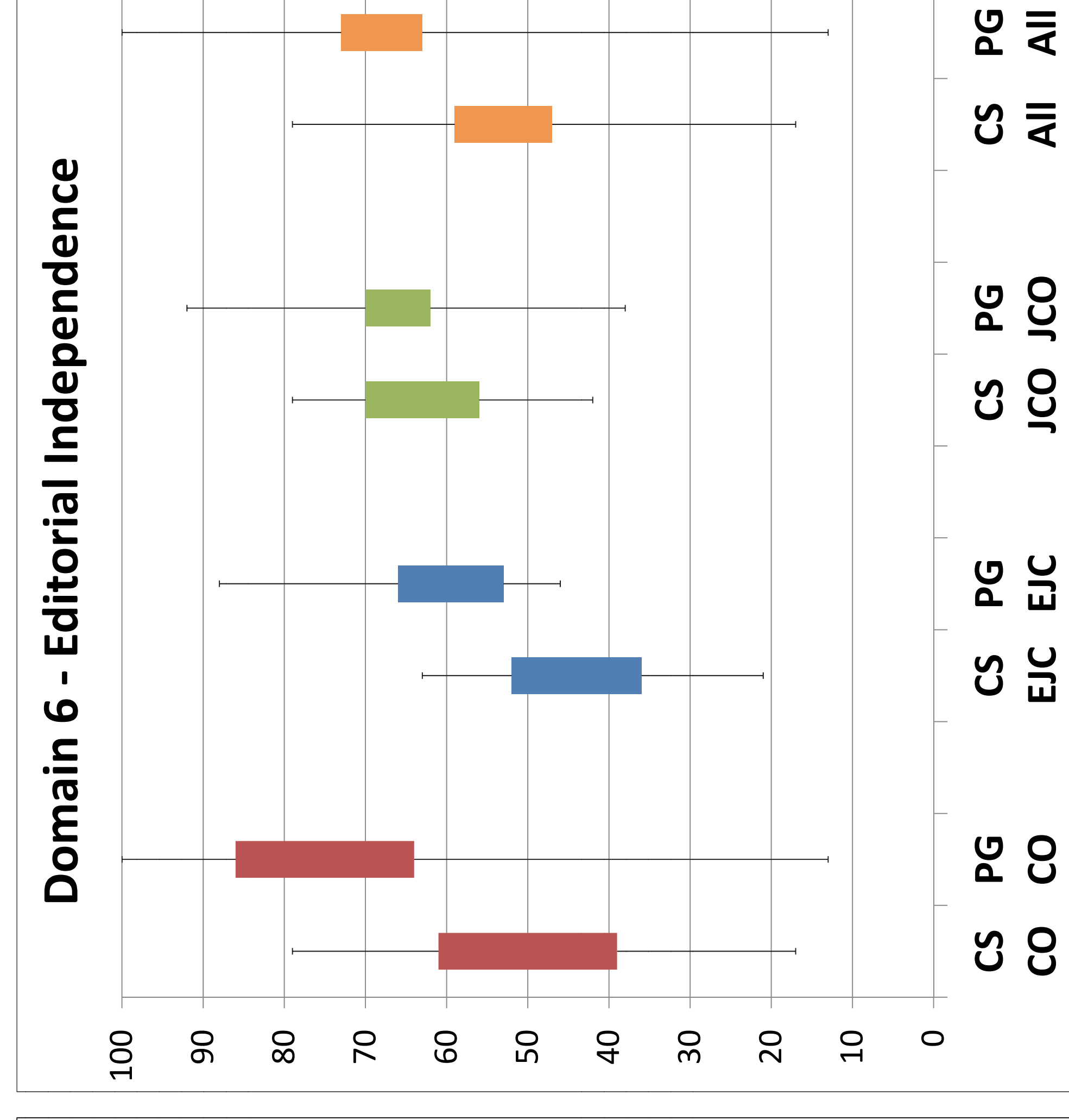
- Practice guidelines (PG) scored consistently higher than consensus statements (CS) on the rigour of development domain.
- Practice guidelines scored consistently higher than consensus statements on the editorial independence domain.

AGREE II DOMAINS 3 & 6⁶

Domain 3 – Rigour of Development ⁶	
1.	Systematic methods were used to search for evidence.
2.	The criteria for selecting the evidence are clearly described.
3.	The strengths and limitations of the body of evidence are clearly described.
4.	The methods for formulating the recommendations are clearly described.
5.	The health benefits, side effects, and risks have been considered in formulating the recommendations.
6.	There is an explicit link between the recommendations and the supporting evidence.
7.	The guideline has been externally reviewed by experts prior to its publication.
8.	A procedure for updating the guideline is provided.

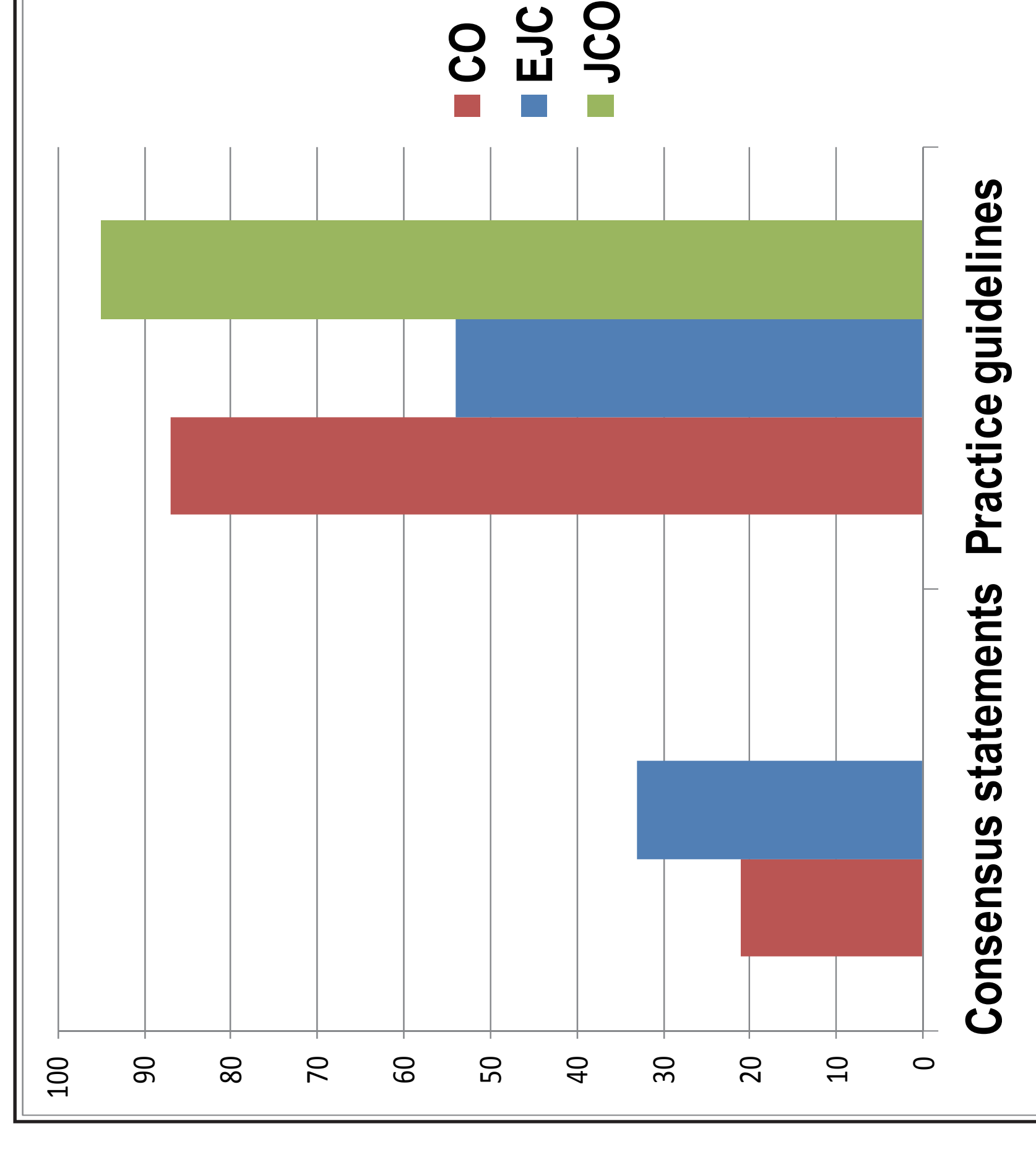
Domain 6 – Editorial Independence

- The views of the funding body have not influenced the content of the guideline.
- Competing interests of guideline development group members have been recorded and addressed.



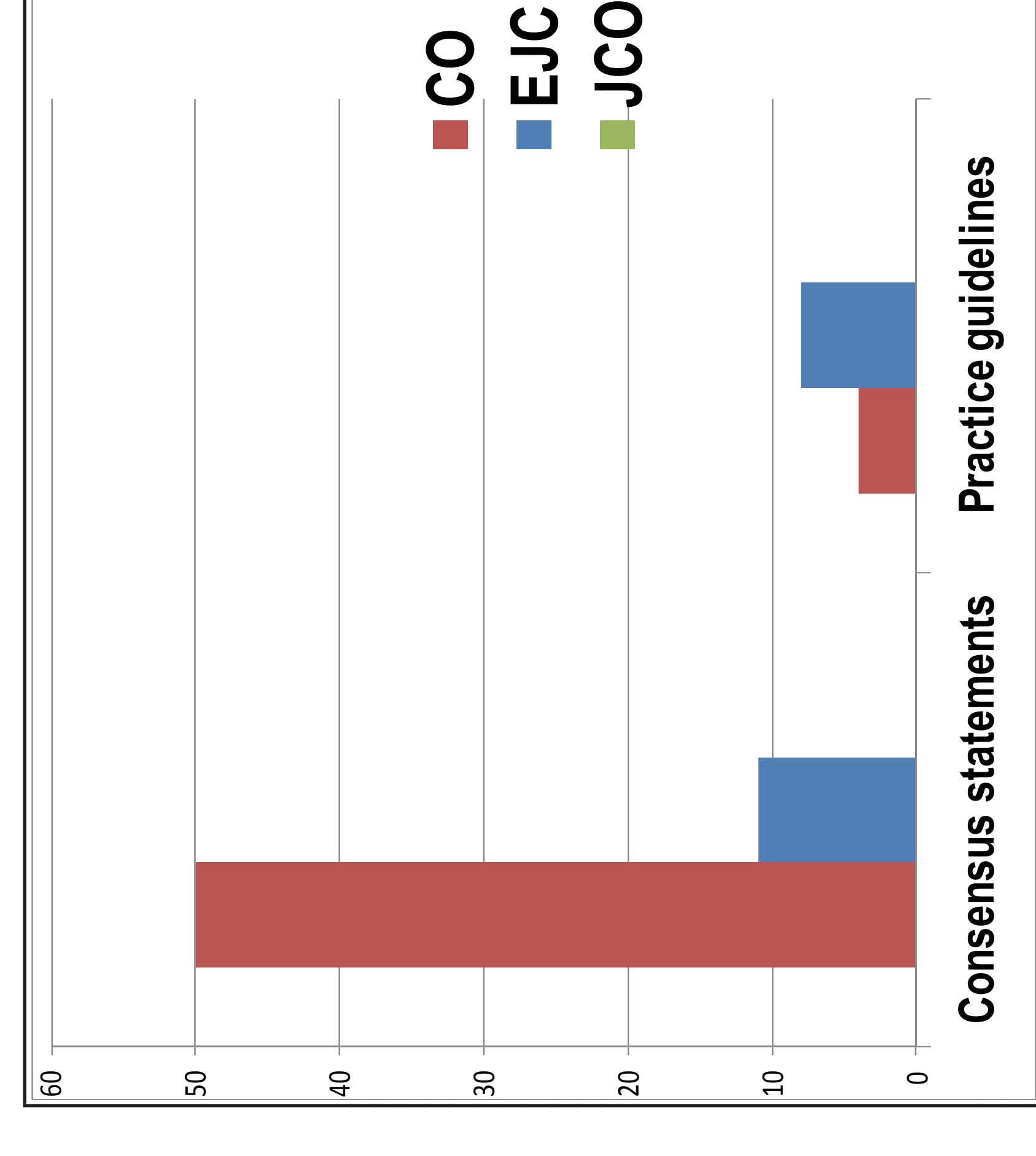
- Practice guidelines (PG) scored consistently higher than consensus statements (CS) on the editorial independence domain.
- Practice guidelines scored consistently higher than consensus statements on the editorial independence domain.

Systematic Review (Domain 3:1)



- Practice guidelines are more likely to perform systematic reviews than consensus statements

Document sponsors' product endorsed



- 50% of consensus statements in CO endorsed a sponsors product in their statement.
- This was seen to a lesser extent in EJC and not at all in JCO.
- No conflict of interest statement acknowledged this association.

Discussion

- There appears to be a discrepancy in the quality of consensus statements compared to practice guidelines in the AGREE II domains of rigour of development and editorial independence.
- While traditionally consensus statements are used to define evidence and recommendations for more esoteric subjects, by definition, they are founded on evidence based research.
- Our results demonstrate that consensus statements are unlikely to perform a systematic review of the literature.
- We also demonstrate a trend for consensus statements to endorse products of their sponsoring organisation.
- This calls into question the editorial independence of such statements.
- There remains room for improvement in the methodological quality of practice guidelines.
- To improve the quality of published guidance documents, we suggest journals adhere to the criteria of the AGREE II tool and only publish documents that score a minimum on these criteria.

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