



AMA Guides® to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment

Current medicine is key to performing equitable and accurate permanent impairment ratings



Q & A with Douglas W. Martin, MD, and J. Mark Melhorn, MD

AMA Guides Editorial Panel Co-Chairs

The American Medical Association supports the adoption of the most current edition of the *AMA Guides® to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment* to provide fair and consistent impairment evaluations. [AMA Guides Sixth 2022](#) is the most current version of the AMA Guides and AMA Guides Sixth. The AMA Guides are maintained exclusively online at [AMAGuidesDigital.com](#). Educational support can be found through [AMA EdHub™](#).

The [AMA Guides Editorial Panel](#) is enabling fair and equitable impairment ratings by delivering the most current medical advancements through annual updates to the *AMA Guides® to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment*. Read about the importance of using the most current medicine to evaluate patients from the AMA Guides Editorial Panel Co-Chairs, Doug Martin, MD, an occupational medicine physician from Iowa, and Mark Melhorn, MD, a hand specialist orthopaedic surgeon from Kansas.

Why is using the most current medicine in the AMA Guides important?

Dr. Melhorn: New medical advances improve outcomes beyond what is anticipated or commonly experienced in the past, or conversely, new research can identify that impairment may be more substantial than previously believed. If the AMA Guides remain static without updates that consider the latest medicine and patient outcomes, impairment will be systemically overrated or underrated.



Can you provide examples of new medical advances that are incorporated within the AMA Guides and how permanent impairment ratings are impacted?

Dr. Martin: When I started practice in the early 1990s, cardiac arrhythmias put a lot of people out of work. We had medications that treated these conditions, but the side effects led to other limitations on activities of daily living. Now we have electrophysiological ablation—no medications, just a “one and done” procedure with limited adverse effects on daily living and patient function. However, older editions of the AMA Guides rate arrhythmias with consideration of outcomes associated with the outdated treatment protocol, often leaving patients with higher ratings that are not reflective of their true condition.

Dr. Melhorn: This is also true for innovation in arthroscopic surgery for rotator cuff repairs for shoulders and femoroacetabular impingement for hips, for example. Arthroscopy may provide less invasive treatments. With newer procedures, we see return to work or sports sooner. These advancements in healthcare require new approaches to rating impairment that are not addressed in editions of the AMA Guides that were published over 20 years ago. New procedures require updated methods for providing fair and equitable impairment ratings for functional loss.

Dr. Martin: That’s right. And sometimes, the medicine is missing altogether. The sixth edition is the only edition of the AMA Guides to address ankle replacement surgery impairment, so in older editions of the AMA Guides, such as the fifth edition, there is no guidance on how to rate this, and physicians just have to do their best with the methods provided in that particular edition, which may lead to inconsistencies in practice. Medical science does not evolve uniformly across body systems, so use of current science is critical to achieving consistent and fair impairment ratings.

What is the impact on patients?

Dr. Melhorn: Providing timely, accurate and equitable impairment ratings allows patients to focus on recovery and return to work with a reduction in distractions that result in additional functional loss. Treatment goals include better outcomes, which are impacted by appropriate evidence-based impairment ratings.

How are the AMA Guides being updated?

Dr. Melhorn: The new AMA Guides Editorial Panel has a transparent update process, which creates a pathway to continuously update the AMA Guides with the current best evidence-based medicine. This approach will help ensure that future impairment ratings are fair and equitable. The AMA Guides Editorial Panel uses a transparent, multi-stakeholder public process and encourages input from the community at large.

Dr. Martin: All stakeholders are invited to develop and submit change proposals to update the AMA Guides in their areas of expertise for the Editorial Panel to consider. The goal of providing physicians and other qualified health care professionals with authoritative guidance based on the best available evidence and expert consensus remains unchanged.

More information on the AMA Guides

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