Title: New directions to Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts in Wales to fund implementation of NICE Technology Appraisal Guidance
Title: Direction to Health Authorities and NHS Trusts to fund the implementation of NICE Technology Appraisal Guidance

Dear Colleague

Purpose

To advise you of the new Direction which comes into force from 20 October 2003. This new Direction supercedes directions issued on 28 February 2002 and replaces references to Health Authorities with Local Health Boards rather than Health Authorities. The new Direction:

- revokes the Directions to Health Authorities and NHS Trusts dated 28/02/02 and subsequent amendments on 01/08/02 and 14/11/02;
- takes account of the changes to the configuration of the NHS in Wales on 01/04/03 and
- lists guidance that has either been exempted or had its implementation period extended.

Background

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) was launched in April 1999 and is a Special Health Authority with an England and Wales remit to promote clinical excellence and the effective use of available resources in the health service. Operating on an England and Wales basis ensures that good practice is identified wherever it is developing and promulgated widely across the NHS for the benefit of all patients. It promotes consistent high quality standards and fairness of access to treatment across the NHS.

Although NICE made headway in issuing robust, evidence based standards, implementation was variable across Wales and the extent to which NICE appraisal guidance are implemented is of obvious concern to the Welsh Assembly Government as well as to the Institute. Guidance that is not implemented, or not implementable, is valueless. However, informal discussions with senior officers of the Royal Colleges and other professional associations leads us to believe that NICE guidance is broadly welcomed; considered to be robust and authoritative; and of considerable value in routine clinical practice.

The Minister for Health and Social Services, Jane Hutt, decided to bring in directions to ensure that funding to implement NICE appraisal guidance is made available, ensuring patients get the best quality treatment on an equitable basis, not based on geography. These directions were issued 28 February 2002 and provided a statutory requirement for Health Authorities to ensure acceptable arrangements are in place to fund the implementation of all NICE appraisal guidance issued since 26 February 1999.

Similar arrangements are also in place in England, which were announced by Lord Hunt in December 2001 and came into force on 1st January 2002.
Next Steps

Directions are being issued today which replace the previous Directions. The new Directions refer to Local Health Boards rather than Health Authorities. The new Direction also lists the guidance that has either been exempted or had its implementation period extended.

It will be for LHBs to ensure that satisfactory arrangements are in place for patients to receive treatment within the terms of NICE guidance. Generally, this will mean the introduction of robust strategies within service agreements with NHS Trusts for the implementation of all appraisal guidance.

Timing

The implementation of NICE appraisal guidance is required to be made within three months of issue and will apply to all technology appraisals issued by NICE. However, there have been occasions when a longer implementation period is desirable and we will be requesting NICE to identify those situations. We will continue to notify LHBs and Trusts where it becomes apparent that there is an issue over implementation timescales.

Monitoring

The Commission for Health Improvement and the Performance Management Framework will monitor, systematically, the implementation of NICE guidance.

CHI will take action to ensure that NHS organisations have mechanisms in place to:
- Know when NICE guidance is issued;
- Know who is affected;
- Document in patient records, the reasons NICE guidance is not followed;
- Review and collect data;
- Develop suitable organisational and financial arrangements; and
- Monitor at Board level.

Further Information

For further information about the directions, please contact Mr Dominic Worsey (029) 2082 3083.

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WHC (2003)

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For Information:

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