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Title: The role of the information specialist in supporting the production and review of technology appraisals at the National Institute for Health & Clinical Excellence (NICE)

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The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation based in England responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) was set up in April 1999 as a National Health Service (NHS) special health authority for England and Wales.

The Department of Health commissions NICE to develop different types of guidance for the NHS, comprising clinical guidelines (including standard and short clinical guidelines), guidance on public health, technology appraisals and interventional procedures.

Technology appraisals

Technology appraisals are recommendations on the use of new and existing medicines and treatments within the NHS. Recommendations are based on a review of clinical evidence which measures how well the medicine or treatment works, as well as economic evidence which measures how well the medicine or treatment works in relation to how much it costs the NHS and whether it represents value for money. There are two types of appraisals – single technology appraisal (STA) and multiple technology appraisal (MTA). An STA is specifically designed for the appraisal of a single product, device or other technology with a single indication where most of the relevant evidence lies with one manufacturer or sponsor. An MTA includes more than one product, device or technology or more than one indication or more than one manufacturer or sponsor. The systematic review work for technology appraisals is undertaken by independent evidence review groups based in universities. These assessment groups have information specialists within their teams who undertake the systematic literature searching. The beginning of the appraisals process involves a scoping phase which defines the details of what an appraisal will and will not examine. The scope defines the parameters of the topic such as the population, interventions, outcomes and comparators and aims to set the boundaries for the topic.

The information specialists in the NICE Information Services team play a key part in contributing to the scoping work for technology appraisals. This involves providing information on the condition in question including epidemiological information, a description and details of the technology being used as well as retrieving literature on relevant key trials. The information specialists track licensing information and key trials on each appraisal topic through to publication.

Reviews of technology appraisal guidance

When the Institute publishes a technology appraisal, it indicates the date when the guidance will be considered for review. This date is the 'review date'. The review date refers to the month and year in which the Institute consults on proposals for reviewing the guidance with relevant stakeholders. The review date is set in reference to the anticipated rate of development in the evidence of the technology and when reporting pivotal ongoing research is expected. The length of time between guidance publication and the review date will vary between 1 to 5 years.

The information specialist plays a pivotal role in helping determine whether it is appropriate to review a piece of guidance. In addition to collecting information, the information specialist critically evaluates information in order to decide if there is sufficient new evidence to warrant a review. This goes beyond finding and checking for relevance, and involves piecing together the current picture around the specified technology. A literature search is carried out by an information specialist and a proposal paper is produced, which summarises any new evidence, issues to consider and makes a proposal for how to proceed with the review. The information specialist leads on the production of this proposal, together with a technical analyst and senior director in the appraisals team.

The proposal is discussed and ratified by an internal group (called guidance executive) before consultees and commentators are given the opportunity to respond to the proposal. Responses are summarised by the information specialist, and commented on by a technical analyst. A final decision is made by the guidance executive group after reviewing the responses received. Options can include guidance being placed on a static list and not being reviewed (if evidence has not changed), technology appraisals being recommended to be incorporated into a clinical guideline, deferring the review pending the publication of new evidence or proceeding to review and updating the technology appraisal guidance.

This presentation will outline the role played by the information specialist in contributing to the production of technology appraisals guidance as well as the challenges of shaping the review process of technology appraisals.