National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

Centre for Guidelines progress report

1. This report provides an update on key issues and developments in the Centre for Guidelines in the period of November to December 2020.

Summary of activity

Two guidelines were published in November (Human and animal bites: antimicrobial prescribing and Acute coronary syndromes [update]) and two in December (Diabetes in pregnancy: management from preconception to the postnatal period and Diabetes (type 1 and type 2) in children and young people: diagnosis and management [update]).

One rapid COVID-19 guideline was published in November (Reducing the risk of venous thromboembolism in over 16s with COVID-19) and two in December (Managing the long-term effects of COVID-19, and Vitamin D). The guideline on managing the long-term effects of COVID-19 is co-badged with SIGN and the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) as development partners, and the guideline on vitamin D is co-badged with Public Health England (PHE) and the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN).

We consulted on 6 guidelines in the period November to December and are continuing to ask stakeholders to tell us if there are any particular issues relating to COVID-19 that we should take into account when finalising each guideline for publication.

Four surveillance reviews were published, of which 3 were exceptional reviews. Exceptional reviews are triggered by events such as changes in the evidence base, policy, legislation or recommendations from other key stakeholders and bodies. One of the exceptional reviews was in response to recommendations from the PHE review on the problems of dependence and withdrawal associated with medicines in adults. This impacted 4 guidelines. The team is also currently undertaking reviews of guidelines impacted by the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch (HSIB) national reports. In total, there are currently 12 surveillance reviews in progress, of which 7 are exceptional reviews.

The publishing team joined the directorate in November.

Notable issues and developments

Ongoing response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 team is almost fully staffed, with 2 roles currently being recruited to. We began work on the migration, integration and maintenance of NHS England and Improvement (NHSE/I) COVID-19 specialty guides. We have reviewed all the specialty guides and addressed any pressing editorial issues for publication. Twenty-eight specialty guides are now published on the NICE website. We have mapped all content from the NHSE/I Specialty guides to the NICE rapid guidelines and NICE's standard portfolio of guidance, to identify any duplicate or overlapping content. The next stage is to determine, using machine learning processes, where content can be integrated to produce a single point of access on the clinical management of COVID-19.

Since the new rapid COVID-19 guideline on managing the long-term effects of COVID-19 represents a new and emerging condition, the guideline included the development of a case definition, which has been translated into SNOMED CT codes in order to use new data to refine and improve the case definition as new evidence and data emerges. The guideline will be reviewed using an iterative or 'living' approach, in line with the rest of the COVID-19 rapid guidelines suite. Surveillance searches are undertaken and sifted weekly to check for any emerging evidence to facilitate rapid updating. The COVID-19 team are collaborating with the WHO and the Australian National COVID-19 Clinical Evidence Taskforce to share literature searches, discuss and explore methods and approaches for this new condition and align guidance where possible.

The guideline on the use of vitamin D in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 was requested by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care following the publication of an update of our evidence review in June 2020. NICE worked jointly with PHE and SACN to develop the recommendations.

Other activities

We have had successful pre-scoping meetings with SIGN and the British Thoracic Society (BTS) to agree update areas for the recently commissioned guideline update of Asthma: diagnosis, monitoring and chronic asthma management (NG80). The guideline will be delivered in collaboration with SIGN and BTS. This collaboration will address the need for a single source of UK guidance on the diagnosis and management of asthma.

We published the draft updated guideline on Myalgic encephalomyelitis (or encephalopathy)/chronic fatigue syndrome: diagnosis and management for consultation in November.

We are participating in the steering group for a project being developed through the Quality Safety and Outcomes Policy Research Unit to consider the use of core outcome sets in social care.

The publishing team has continued its work to fix accessibility issues with our existing content. This is part of phase 1 of our undertaking to meet the accessibility regulations that came into force in September 2018.

Key issues and developments

The key issue is the risk to outputs in balancing workload with capacity and staff wellbeing and caring responsibilities as the rates of COVID-19 infection increase. We began a phased restart of the non-COVID-19 guidelines programme in June, and as noted above have been maintaining the rapid COVID-19 portfolio. We also continue to produce exceptional surveillance reviews of non-COVID guidelines. We expect these pressures to continue, and will be actively prioritising our activities based on stage of development and topic. The aim is to ensure that we maintain development and outputs where we can based on system capacity and ability to implement.

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January 2021