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 January to February 2021.

Summary of activity

One guideline was published in February (Safeguarding adults in care homes). The updated guideline on Chronic pain: assessment and management was also due to publish in February, but has been rescheduled to April to facilitate implementation and support the Public Health England (PHE) Prescribed Medicines Review.

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

Six surveillance reviews have published, of which 4 were exceptional reviews. In total, there are currently 8 surveillance reviews in progress with a further 9 lower priority exceptional reviews pending review. A further review and update of the lung cancer algorithm is also underway.

Notable issues and developments

Ongoing response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 team is now fully staffed. The initial work on integrating the NHS England and NHS Improvement specialty guides is now complete and the team is working with National Clinical Directors to ensure that the guidance is up to date and merged with NICE guidance to create a coherent portfolio of national guidance on COVID-19. Recent updates of recommendations reflect the need to consider vaccination status in treatment.

We have begun development of a Managing acute COVID-19 guideline, which brings together all of the existing recommendations on care and treatment of people with COVID-19 and make new recommendations on therapeutics for COVID-19. The guideline is being developed in MAGICapp, a structured guideline authoring tool. This is a new innovation for the team and allows more efficient international collaboration with the Australian National COVID-19 Clinical Evidence taskforce and the World Health Organisation.

We published rapid evidence summaries on the interleukin‑6 inhibitors tocilizumab and sarilumab for COVID-19.

Other activities

There have been other activities related to international collaboration, use of data in guideline development and addressing inequalities. These are summarised below.

In January, staff from the Centre for Guidelines joined the NICE International team in a meeting with the Cyprus Public Health Insurance Organization (HIO) to discuss opportunities for supporting guideline contextualisation activities.

We also met with a team from the Sentinel Stroke National Audit Programme (SSNAP) to review a data application and analytics proposal that will support development of the update to the stroke rehabilitation guideline. We are also exploring the use of Prescribing Observatory for Mental Health (POMH) data to support scoping of the guideline on Violence and aggression.

In February, we met with representatives from Campbell UK & Ireland (Queens University Belfast), and the National Guideline Alliance to explore collaborative opportunities to inform the development of the NICE guideline on Integrated health and social care for people experiencing homelessness, the underlying causes of which include structural, societal and economic factors such as poverty and deprivation, unaffordable housing, unemployment, exclusion and discrimination. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the issues facing people experiencing homelessness into a sharp focus. The Campbell Collaboration is an international social science research network that produces high quality, open and policy-relevant evidence syntheses, plain language summaries and policy briefs.

Other specific guidelines and advice

We engaged with sector partners regarding the timing of consultation on the guideline on Safeguarding adults in care homes. It was agreed that in light of concerns of an increased risk of safeguarding concerns and referrals during lockdown, it was important to proceed with the consultation. Organisations representing care home providers were supportive of the recommendations, and saw the guideline as timely to help them to support their staff to identify safeguarding concerns more effectively in a period where safeguarding referrals have increased. We engaged with the Care Quality Commission, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, Local Government Association and the Network of Safeguarding Adult Board Chairs, and extended the embargoed release of the guideline to enable our partners to review the guidance and prepare for publication. We will be developing two Social Care Quick Guides that will be produced by SCIE, and an updated visual summary of the recommendations on identifying abuse and neglect.

Key issues and developments

We convened the Cross Agency Topic Prioritisation group in January to give a steer for initial prioritisation of the guidelines portfolio. The group consists of representatives from NHS England and NHS Improvement, the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England. We are currently implementing the first stage of prioritisation for ratification and further discussion by the panel in May.

We are making good progress with the content strategy, which focuses on raising the content maturity level of NICE. This will require a transformation from content being integrated post-publication, through to a more consistent approach that incorporates systematic user testing and organisational structures and processes aligned with user requirements. We have used a 'test and learn' approach to develop alternative ways of presenting and structuring our content, by integrating and linking it, to support clinicians and patients in making evidence-based shared decisions about medicine choices in managing type 2 diabetes in adults. This approach is informed by, and in turn informs, the content strategy and provides frameworks that can be adapted and scaled up across the content portfolio.

NORMA (NICE-ONS Recommendation Matching Algorithm), which we have developed in collaboration with the ONS, has now been rolled out for use across NICE. For the first time NICE has an accessible repository of all its recommendations. Additionally, NORMA allows exploration of a relationship in content using natural language processing techniques.

The biggest risk continued to be balancing workload with capacity and staff wellbeing and caring responsibilities. We are taking a case-by-case approach to our work porgramme and encouraging flexibility to mitigate the risk of delayed outputs, while being sensitive to pressures on staff.

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