

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND CLINICAL EXCELLENCE
SPECIAL HEALTH AUTHORITY**

Frequently asked questions (FAQs) about topic selection

What is topic selection?

Topics are the specific treatments, drugs or ways of caring for people with specific conditions or diseases, about which the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) will provide guidance for the NHS and the wider public health community. Topic selection is the process determining which topics NICE will be asked to issue guidance on, as part of its remit for providing national guidance for the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.

The topics NICE considers come from different sources, including healthcare professionals, patients, carers, the general public and policy experts. It's important that appropriate topics are selected for NICE work programmes, to ensure that the guidance issued is relevant and addresses priority issues which will help improve the health of the population.

Why has NICE taken responsibility for managing the topic selection process?

The Department of Health (DH) held a consultation early in 2006 which proposed a transfer of responsibility for managing the topic selection process from DH to NICE. The changes were proposed to help ensure that NICE's work programme addresses topics of importance to patients and professionals and makes the best use of NHS resources; to ensure public health topics are part of the selection process; and to improve the timescale in which DH sends the list of new topics to NICE (known as topic referral).

The consultation ended on 9 June 2006, and responsibility for the process has now transferred to NICE.

What does the new topic selection process look like?

In a very simplified form, the new process will work on this basis:

- a. Anyone can suggest topics for NICE guidance
- b. Suggestions will first be assessed to see if they meet NICE's remit
- c. Suggestions will then be filtered according to selection criteria set by DH, and further information will be gathered to brief the consideration panels
- d. Filtered suggestions will then go to a set of consideration panels (see description below) which will choose their priority topics and draft a remit for each of them
- e. Suggestions prioritised by the consideration panels will then go to the Referral Oversight Group (a DH + NICE group). This group will draw up a priority list from all the recommendations of the consideration panels
- f. Suggestions will then go to DH Ministers for a final decision on which topics to refer to NICE

The broad outlines of this new process are in the DH consultation document on page 14

(http://www.dh.gov.uk/Consultations/ClosedConsultations/ClosedConsultationsArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4135985&chk=NLLj3I).

However, changes have been made as a result of the consultation, and will continue to be made as a result of experience of managing the new process. A draft manual is available online or in hard copy from NICE (0161 209 3888) outlining the topic selection process in detail.

What are consideration panels?

As part of the new process seven consideration panels are being set up to provide support to the topic selection process:

- Cancer
- Children, adolescents and maternity
- General and acute
- Long-term conditions
- Mental health
- Vascular conditions
- Public health

Each panel is made up of 15-20 voting members, including health professionals – both specialists in the field and generalists such as GPs – and lay people, plus a number of non-voting members. The panels consider possible topics for NICE guidance. From all the suggested topics, the panels will prioritise and recommend topics they think are most important and fit best with NICE's work programme.

What are the responsibilities of the new consideration panels?

The proposed terms of reference of the new consideration panels are attached here.

What is the timetable for putting the new topic selection process into practice?

Referrals are made by DH to NICE in stages known as 'waves'. Wave 14 – the last to be managed by DH under the current process – is ongoing and will not be completed until March 2007.

Wave 15 – the first under the new process managed by NICE – started with the first round of consideration panel meetings in November 2006. The first new Referral Oversight Group meeting will be held in February 2007, leading to the first referrals under the new process in March 2007.

This will overlap with the final referrals from the previous process. The second round of consideration panel meetings will be held in March 2007.

Does this topic selection process cover all of NICE's work programmes?

The process covers NICE's work programmes in clinical guidelines, technology appraisals and public health. It does not cover interventional procedures, as they are not referred to NICE by a Department of Health Minister.

Where can I get more information?

Topic selection is managed from NICE's Manchester office. Contact Rachel Hatton on 0161 209 3081 or email rachel.hatton@nice.org.uk for more information.

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