

Contributing to clinical guidelines – a guide for patients and carers

Factsheet 5: Helping to put NICE recommendations into practice (implementation)

This factsheet is one of a series that describes how patients, carers and the organisations that represent their interests can help NICE develop clinical guidelines.

- Factsheet 1: How NICE develops clinical guidelines
- Factsheet 2: How organisations representing patients and carers can get involved
- Factsheet 3: How individual patients and carers can get involved
- Factsheet 4: Support for patients and carers involved in developing a guideline
- **Factsheet 5: Helping to put NICE recommendations into practice**

The series aims to:

- help patients and carers take part in developing NICE clinical guidelines
- explain why NICE wants patients and carers to be involved
- explain what patients and carers can expect if they do get involved
- explain how NICE supports individuals and organisations throughout the development of a guideline.

What is NICE?

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is an independent organisation that helps those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider community deliver high-quality health and social care. We provide the following types of guidance or advice:

- Clinical guidelines – recommendations for the NHS about the treatment and care of people with specific conditions
- Health technology guidance – recommendations for the NHS on new and existing medicines, diagnostic techniques, treatments and procedures
- Public health guidance – recommendations for local authorities and others on promoting and maintaining good health and preventing disease
- Social care guidance – recommendations for local authorities and service providers about care for people using social care services

Different types of guidance apply to different parts of the UK. NICE also has other related responsibilities, such as developing quality standards for the NHS, local authorities and other providers of health and social care services in England. In all our work, we aim to ensure that our methods and guidance promote equality. For more information about our work see

www.nice.org.uk

What do we mean by ‘patients and carers’?

We use the terms ‘patients’ and ‘carers’ in this series to cover all groups of lay people (people who are not healthcare professionals) who contribute to NICE guidelines. This includes people who have a relevant condition or disability, and people such as family and friends who provide unpaid care for them. It also covers organisations representing patients and carers’ interests, including voluntary sector or non-governmental organisations. We recognise that readers may use other terms such as ‘consumer’, ‘service user’, ‘user representative’ or ‘patient representative’.

Helping to put NICE recommendations into practice (implementation)

NICE clinical guidelines cover the NHS in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. (See www.sign.ac.uk for information about clinical guidelines in Scotland.) NHS organisations such as hospitals, clinical commissioning groups, local health boards and GP practices are expected to take into account the recommendations in NICE clinical guidelines when deciding what treatments to offer people.

This involves looking at what they are currently doing and making changes as needed.

NICE has a programme of work to help people put its recommendations into practice at a local level. This includes producing materials to encourage and help organisations and individual NHS staff members introduce NICE guideline recommendations into their practice. These materials may include:

- educational resources to help support the education and learning needs for those responsible for implementing NICE guidelines
- information on how organisations can assess ('audit') their current practice against the recommendations in a guideline
- a report that gives the likely costs or savings from putting the recommendations into practice nationally
- a spreadsheet (known as a 'costing template') that allows individual organisations to work out the likely costs or savings of putting the recommendations into practice in their local area
- information to help the people who commission services in the NHS to ensure that they have what they need (in terms of number of staff members, equipment, available training) to act on the recommendations in a guideline.

Where applicable NICE will support national organisations to develop useful materials for a particular guideline. This may include patient information sheets or sample hospital discharge letters.

More information about the work of the NICE implementation team, and the materials that support putting NICE clinical guidelines into practice, can be found on the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk/usingguidance).

How patient and carer groups can help promote NICE guidelines

Patient and carer organisations can use their networks and influence to publicise a guideline, and encourage and support its implementation locally and nationally.

They can do this in a number of ways including:

- publicising the guidelines on their website, through social media and in mailings to their members
- including important messages from a NICE guideline in their leaflets and other materials for patients and carers
- helping to interpret how a guideline should be adapted to their local area and population
- conducting surveys to find out whether NICE guidelines are being followed, and using the findings to push for improvements
- helping to make sure that NICE guideline recommendations are included in plans to improve the quality of healthcare delivered by the NHS
- encouraging the use of NICE clinical guidelines when contracts for local services are being drawn up
- supporting healthcare professionals when they seek funding to implement NICE recommendations
- working with NHS organisations, healthcare professionals and patients, carers and their advocates to help put NICE recommendations into practice locally.

How can patients, carers and members of the public help make sure NICE's recommendations are being followed?

Factsheet 1 in this series describes the different versions of the guidelines that NICE publishes. People may wish to look first at 'Information for the Public', but can also look for more detail in the other versions of the guideline. Patients, carers and the public can use this information to:

- take an active part with healthcare professionals in making choices about their healthcare and treatment
- be informed about what NICE has advised the NHS is the best available care, based on evidence about clinical and cost effectiveness
- compare the care they are offered with the care recommended by NICE, and discuss the reasons for any differences with their healthcare professionals
- improve their understanding of the options available during different stages of their care and treatment.

Patients and carers, local Healthwatch and other local groups can also tell the Care Quality Commission (www.cqc.org.uk) whether they think an NHS organisation's arrangements for delivering treatment and care are suitable and in line with NICE recommendations, and whether people have received good-quality, appropriate information about their care.

What if treatment recommended by NICE is not available?

NICE guidelines are not a replacement for the judgement of a healthcare professional. However, recommendations from NICE are expected to be taken fully into account when decisions about treatment and care are made. If patients think that a treatment that has been recommended by NICE is suitable for them, but it is not available in their local area or is not being offered to them, they should first discuss this with their healthcare professional. Not every treatment recommended by NICE is appropriate for every patient with a particular condition, and there may be a good reason for why a treatment is not offered.

After having this discussion, if the patient (or their carer) still thinks that the treatment should be available for them there are a number of formal steps that they can take. Information about these steps is available on the NHS Choices website: www.nhs.uk

Many terms in this factsheet are described in the NICE website glossary – www.nice.org.uk/website/glossary