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PRESS RELEASE

Report highlights progress on cancer drugs but more can be done

Today's report by NHS Cancer Director Professor Mike Richards on the uptake in the NHS of new cancer drugs makes clear that many more people are getting access to effective cancer drugs evaluated by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE).

This is good news, but the report also makes clear that the NHS can do more. Amongst other factors, it emphasises the importance of local leadership in the NHS to make sure that doctors and nurses have access to effective treatments and are encouraged to use them.

NICE chief executive, Andrew Dillon said: "We welcome Professor Richard's report, which is consistent with our own surveys and analysis. We support his proposals for supporting the NHS to do better and look forward to working with him. We will shortly be appointing an executive director at NICE with responsibility for helping the NHS to apply our guidance."

Ends

Notes to Editors

About the National Cancer Director's report

1. In October 2003, the Secretary of State for Health commissioned the National Cancer Director to produce a report on variations in usage of cancer drugs approved by NICE. The report, published today, concluded that:

- Overall usage of cancer drugs generally increases following positive appraisals from NICE.
 - Variation in usage does exist across the country and cannot be accounted for by differences in casemix and, for most drugs, is unlikely to be accounted for by cross boundary flows alone. However, variation does appear to lessen over time once a positive appraisal from NICE has been published.
 - Reasons for variation are complex but do not appear to be associated with direct funding restrictions on the use of these drugs. Instead the main impact on usage seems to be constraints in service capacity and differences in clinical practice.
2. For further information and a copy of the National Cancer Director's report please contact the Department of Health press office on 020 7210 5658.

About NICE

3. NICE is part of the NHS. It is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on treatments and care for those using the NHS in England and Wales. Its guidance is for healthcare professionals and patients and their carers to help them make decisions about treatment and healthcare. For further information about NICE you can visit www.nice.org.uk.
4. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:
- the use of new and existing medicines and treatments within the NHS in England and Wales – technology appraisals
 - the appropriate treatment and care of patients with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS in England and Wales – clinical guidelines.
 - whether interventional procedures used for diagnosis or treatment are safe enough and work well enough for routine use– interventional procedures.
- NICE also funds three enquiries that undertake research into the way patients are treated to identify ways of improving the quality of care (the investigations are known as confidential enquiries).
5. NICE guidance and recommendations are prepared by independent groups that include professionals working in the NHS and people who are familiar with the issues affecting patients and carers.