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PRESS RELEASE

NICE launches new clinical guideline on preoperative tests to improve patient care

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has issued its latest clinical guideline, on the use of routine preoperative tests in elective (pre-planned) surgery for children and adults. Every year around 5 million elective surgical procedures are performed by the NHS in England. For many years it has been usual practice in many hospitals to test patients preoperatively for unsuspected conditions that might affect their treatment. However, the number and type of tests that are given before surgery vary considerably across the country. Carrying out lots of preoperative tests can lead to unnecessary delays or cancellation of operations as well as inconvenience and discomfort to patients because of 'false positive' test results. The NICE guideline will ensure that no matter where people live in England and Wales, they can be confident that the health professionals caring for them have clear recommendations about the tests that should and should not be carried out.

The guideline makes recommendations about the appropriateness of carrying out the following tests:

- Plain chest X-ray (radiograph)
- Resting electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Full blood count (for example to test for anaemia)
- Haemostasis (to test how well the blood clots)
- Renal function

- Random blood glucose (to test for diabetes)
- Urine analysis (for example to test for urinary infections or kidney problems)
- Blood gases (to test for cardiovascular or lung problems)
- Lung function
- Pregnancy
- Sickle cell anaemia

The appropriateness of testing depends on the characteristics of patients, for example their age, other illnesses they may have and the type of surgery that is planned. Therefore the recommendations are set out in 'look-up' tables, cross-referenced by the type of surgery, common chronic illnesses and age.

The guideline is accompanied by an information leaflet for the public which clearly explains what the tests are for and what to do if they want more information.

The National Collaborating Centre (NCC) for Acute Care has developed the guideline. The NCC is a group of health professional and patient/carer organisations who manage the development of clinical guidelines for NICE. The NCC's follow the Institute's standards of guideline development. They established a guideline development group consisting of service users and carers, health professionals and academics who reviewed the worldwide data and expert opinion, alongside current clinical practice, the experience of service users and the feedback they received from two rounds of widespread consultation.

Andrea Sutcliffe, Planning and Resources Director and Executive Lead for this guideline, said: "This guideline is good news for patients and health professionals. It will help to ensure that all NHS Trusts operate to the same high standards in their provision of preoperative tests for elective surgery. We hope that the information for the public which accompanies the guideline will help inform people about this important aspect their care."

Jacqueline Dutchak, Director of the NCC for Acute Care, said "This is the second guideline produced by the NCC for Acute Care on behalf of NICE. It has been developed following a collaborative and consultative approach, using the best available evidence and will help the NHS provide the highest standards of care for

people undergoing elective surgery. The guideline should enable healthcare professionals to feel confident that when implementing this guidance they will be providing their patients with the best standards of care.”

Antony Fisher, Consultant Anaesthetist and Clinical Director, Critical and Surgical Care Group, King’s College Hospital NHS Trust says “The dearth of evidence to prove a positive relationship between performance of routine preoperative investigations and better clinical outcomes of anaesthetic and surgical interventions has historically left this area of practice open to uncertainty and thus wide variations in both practice and teaching, with a tendency to lean to over investigation as a defence against potential criticism of lack of thoroughness. The advent of these guidelines means that this uncertainty about what will be perceived as good practice is now removed and the rationalisation of preoperative investigation practice, which many institutions, including King's, have attempted previously, may now proceed confidently with the impetus and authority that these guidelines bring.”

Ends

Notes to Editors

About NICE

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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).
4. 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.

About clinical guidelines

5. Clinical guidelines are recommendations on the appropriate treatment and care of patients with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS in England and Wales. They sit alongside, but do not replace, the knowledge and skills of experienced health professionals.
6. NICE clinical guidelines are developed by independent groups that include healthcare professionals working in the NHS, patients and people who are familiar with the issues affecting patients and carers. Professional and patient/carer groups whose members are likely to be affected by the guideline are able to submit information and comment on the recommendations before they are finalised.
7. For details of NICE clinical guidelines currently in development, log on to the website at <http://www.nice.org.uk/catcg1.asp?c=20055>.

About the NCC Acute Care

8. The National Collaborating Centre for Acute Care is based at the Royal College of Surgeons of England. The following partners have member status on the management board of the centre:
 - [Faculty of Dental Surgery](#)
 - [Royal College of Anaesthetists](#)
 - [Royal College of Ophthalmologists](#)
 - [Royal College of Surgeons](#)
 - [Department of Public Health and Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine](#)
 - [Patient liaison group, Royal College of Surgeons](#)

Additional professional partners include:

- [Royal College of General Practitioners](#)
 - [Royal College of Nursing](#)
 - [Royal College of Physicians](#)
 - [Royal College of Pathologists](#)
 - [Royal College of Radiologists](#)
 - Clinical Effectiveness Forum for Allied Health Professionals
 - [Intensive Care Society](#)
 - [Ambulance Association](#)
 - [British Association for Accident & Emergency Medicine](#)
 - All surgical and dental speciality associations
9. Local health communities should review their existing service provision for preoperative tests against this guideline as they begin the development of their Local Delivery Plans. The review should consider the resources required to implement fully the recommendations set out in the guideline, the people and processes involved, and the timeline over which full implementation is envisaged. This guideline should be used in conjunction with the guidance from the NHS Modernisation Agency on preoperative assessment for inpatients and day surgery, which is available from www.modern.nhs.uk/theatreprogramme