

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND CLINICAL EXCELLENCE

SPECIAL HEALTH AUTHORITY

BRIEFING NOTE FOR SMT

NICE Technology Appraisal Guidance and the work of the Health Protection Agency on avian influenza

Background

NICE has two pieces of technology appraisals guidance on the use of antiviral agents for the prophylaxis (TA67) and treatment (TA58) of influenza. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) has requested clarification, via an informal approach, as to whether NICE guidance applies to the use of oseltamivir for avian influenza.

Issues for Consideration

- Emergence of new highly pathogenic avian influenza with the capacity to infect humans is a concern because it may lead to circumstances where a new subtype of influenza can develop that both causes serious disease and can spread from person to person. The Health Protection Agency is working with others to protect the UK public from the threat of avian influenza. Post-exposure prophylaxis (and possibly treatment) of avian flu incidents forms part of the national response to the current threat of pandemic influenza.
- The HPA and DH are developing contingency plans to prepare the UK for a potential pandemic (The WHO have issued a Pandemic Alert Level 3).
- With respect to NICE Guidance on the prophylaxis and treatment of influenza, the analysis undertaken as part of the assessment report and

the appraisal committee deliberations did not consider the circumstances when a new strain of influenza virus is posing a considerable threat to human health and may be liable to cause a pandemic. The following statements are contained within the Guidance in order to clarify the scope of the recommendations.

‘This Guidance does not cover the circumstances of a pandemic, impending pandemic or a widespread epidemic of a new strain of influenza to which there is little or no community resistance.

‘This Guidance pertains only to the use of antiviral agents in circumstances where it is known that either influenza A or influenza B is circulating in the community’.

Recommendation

Following internal discussions within the Centre for Health Technology Evaluation, which included consideration of the issues highlighted above and discussion with the Chair of the Appraisal Committee, we believe that NICE Guidance on the use of antiviral agents for influenza prophylaxis or treatment does not apply to the circumstances that the Health Protection Agency (and the Department of Health) are dealing with in relation to their work on preparing for a pandemic influenza cause by avian influenza.

We recommend that NICE approach the Health Protection Agency and communicate our position to them.

Dr Carole M Longson

Director, Centre for Health Technology Evaluation

Dr Sarah Garner

Technical Advisor, Centre for Health technology Evaluation

Professor David Barnett,

Chair, Appraisals Committee

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