National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

Communications Directorate progress report

1. This report provides an update on key issues and developments in the Communications Directorate in the period September - October 2020.

Summary of activity

During this period the directorate continued to provide communications support to COVID-19 activities, including: promoting the scope and case definition for our post-COVID-19 syndrome guideline; preparing to transfer and host 24 COVID-19 specialty guides from NHS England and NHS Improvement on the NICE website; and running 2 surveys to assess the usage and perceptions of our COVID-19 rapid guidelines.

In other areas, we've delivered a range of communications activities to support the recruitment of new NICE Fellows and Scholars, produced a range of digital content to support World Evidence Based Healthcare Day, and delivered the first of our autumn series of virtual events. Our media and enquiry handling teams received a large amount of interest in our draft guideline on chronic pain, and the scope of our post-COVID-19 syndrome guideline.

Notable issues and developments

Ongoing response to COVID-19

We provided media and external communications support for publication of the scope of the upcoming guideline on post-COVID syndrome (long COVID). This included a press release, news story, sharing on social media and mailout to key stakeholders. The Press Association, the Daily Mail, [the Telegraph](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/10/30/long-covid-sufferers-face-psychiatric-problems-pain-fatigue/), [Nursing Times](https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/coronavirus/nice-defines-long-covid-as-symptoms-lasting-more-than-12-weeks-30-10-2020/), [National Health Executive](https://www.nationalhealthexecutive.com/articles/rcgp-nice-and-sign-release-further-details-long-term-effects-covid-19-document), [Clinical Services Journal](https://www.clinicalservicesjournal.com/story/34087/uk-guideline-on-management-of-the-long-term-effects-of-covid-19) and [Yahoo! UK and Ireland](https://uk.news.yahoo.com/long-covid-coronavirus-covid19-diagnosis-110020009.html) covered the story.

During the reporting period we developed a new web page to host 24 of NHS England and NHS Improvement's COVID-19 specialty guides. At the same time we worked with their communications team on a joint plan of multi-channel communications activities to let the guides' users know that they're transferring to NICE as part of a drive to create a single point of access for all clinical advice and guidance on managing COVID-19. At the time of writing this report we are awaiting confirmation of the transfer and go-live date for these resources on nice.org.uk (expected in November).

Strategic communications advice and support

We supported World Evidence-Based Healthcare Day on 20 October with a range of communications activities. NICE was an official partner in the initiative, which aims to raise awareness of the need for better evidence to inform healthcare policy, practice and decision making to improve health outcomes globally. We produced content for blogs, a podcast, a web news story, and social media, and we disseminated key messages about the global event to UK stakeholders.

During the reporting period we developed 9 briefing notes for the chief executive and chairman, to support their attendance at meetings with key stakeholder organisations including the Human Tissue Authority, the Accelerated Access Collaborative and UK Research and Innovation. We've also developed slides for the chief executive's presentations at the Specialised Health Care Association's quarterly meeting, the student champions' day and for a pre-recorded keynote presentation that will be broadcast next month at the Guidelines Live 2020 conference.

A daily digest of key COVID-related developments for senior management continued during this period. From October, this evolved into a more focused briefing on NICE-related news in the national media, and in a wide range of trade and speciality press. External developments continue to be captured in the weekly policy digest.

As the Centre for Health Technology Evaluation (CHTE) began a series of consultations to review its methods and processes we provided communications support and advice, including supporting the delivery of a webinar on proposed changes to topic selection, and stakeholder engagement to encourage participation in the online consultation. Coverage so far has included NHSE England and NHS Improvement’s ‘Healthcare Leaders Update’ e-bulletin, which goes to the CEO and COO of all trusts and CCGs, and the Royal Society for Public Health’s stakeholder newsletter (6,500 subscribers).

We supported the NICE fellows and scholars programme to secure applications from individuals across health and social care for its 12th annual intake of new recruits. We provided copy for stakeholder organisations' bulletins and newsletters and we promoted the programme via Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, video, and a blog.

Enquiries

During September and October, we responded to 1,224 enquiries, 94% of which were answered within 18 days. We responded to 15 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act, 27 MP letters and 24 parliamentary questions.

Notable enquiry topics in this reporting period included:

* General enquiries about aspects of COVID-19 including some early interest in the rapid guideline in development on long term effects of COVID-19 and continued interest in vitamin D for the prevention or treatment of COVID-19
* Continued interest in the draft guideline on chronic pain: assessment and management following closure of the consultation period.
* Access to pirfenidone and nintedanib for idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis when lung function is over 80%. The recommendations state that both drugs are only recommended if the person has a forced vital capacity between 50% and 80%.

Media

During the reporting period, sentiment percentages for media coverage in September and October were as follows:

* Positive 84%
* Neutral 12%
* Negative 4%

Our draft guideline on chronic pain received quite a few media enquiries in this period and wide media coverage - much of it positive - but we are aware of the considerable public interest in the guideline seen particularly on social media and we will continue to monitor closely.

Our draft quality standard on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder received negative press coverage largely because of a British Pregnancy Advisory Service [(BPSA) press release](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CELamb%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CContent.Outlook%5CTEOCBXRY%5CBPAS%5CBPAS%20press%20release.docx) that raised concerns related to privacy, consent and GDPR. It was picked up by [The Times](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/single-drink-in-pregnancy-will-be-noted-on-babys-file-svk5snk98), who made it the lead item on their [front page](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CELamb%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CContent.Outlook%5CTEOCBXRY%5CCoverage%5CThe-Times_160920.jpg), as well as the Today programme, [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/sep/16/plans-to-record-pregnant-womens-alcohol-consumption-in-england-criticised), [MailOnline](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8737085/Women-drink-single-glass-wine-pregnant-recorded-babys-records.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), [The Sun Online](https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/news/6050201/one-glass-wine-first-week-pregnancy-noted-baby-file/).

Audience insights

COVID-19 rapid guidelines feedback: The audience insight team and field team ran two surveys to capture feedback on usage and perceptions of the NICE rapid guidelines, and the impact of COVID-19 on implementation. (details to be given in the board report oral update)

Consultations: The audience insight team worked closely with CHTE to ensure the stakeholder consultations for topic selection and the methods review are intuitive and user friendly. We are using our survey software in a pilot to facilitate the data collection and analysis on the topic selection to explore operational efficiencies and consider what role this software could play in our insights work going forward.

Events and conferences

The first in our autumn series of virtual events, attended by 181 people, took place on 19 October. The event, entitled 'Relevant, timely and evidence based – exploring what it takes to deliver guidance to a health and care system dealing with COVID-19' was chaired by Paul Chrisp and featured presentations from NICE Centre for Guidelines and Public Involvement Programme representatives, along with speakers from the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal Marsden hospital, and the Richmond Group of Charities. Most respondents to the post-event survey said they found the event interesting and relevant.

The number of people registered for the remaining 3 autumn events - including the virtual Shared Learning Awards - continues to increase through a multi-channel communication plan which includes a digital marketing campaign (see below), newsletter adverts, social media campaigns, web articles and information sent out via our stakeholder networks.

Marketing communications

In October we launched a paid digital marketing campaign consisting of LinkedIn, Google search and display banner advertising and re-targeting. It aims to increase registrations for two of NICE’s autumn virtual events; ‘Putting people first: Collaborating for better medicines support’ (4 Nov) and the Shared Learning Awards (12 Nov). An external digital marketing agency has been commissioned to deliver the work in partnership with the marketing communications team. Learnings from the pilot will be used to optimise future digital marketing campaigns.

As part of an ongoing newsletter review project which aims to streamline and improve the quality of NICE newsletter, we have conducted an audit of all newsletters currently being distributed via Mailchimp and established a new Mailchimp governance process.

Our corporate newsletters, NICE News and Update for Primary Care (UPC) performed well in September and October with average open rates of 26% and click through rates of 4.7% remaining consistent with the last reporting period. Subscriptions to NICE News have grown, with 198 new subscriptions in September and October, bringing the total up to 32,382. Subscriptions to UPC have remained steady in September and October; the total number of subscribers stands at 12,553.

The Chief Executive’s Update mailing performed well in September and October, with an open rate of 29% in September, when the topic covered was NICE's strategic plan development, and 26% in October, when the chief executive wrote about our role in patient safety.

Publishing

In this reporting period the publishing team continued to edit and publish a large volume of COVID-19 and non-COVID guidance. The team also continued its remedial work of the most visited html guidance web pages for each of our guidance products to fix any accessibility issues.

This reporting period marks the last time the publishing team will report from the Communications directorate. After 21 years in the Communications Directorate, the team has moved to the Centre for Guidelines where it will work closely with colleagues on the Connect objectives of integrated guidance, content strategy and improved accessibility, amongst many other activities.

Website performance

There were just over 11 million pageviews on the NICE website during this reporting period, indicating a slight upward trend.

There were over 2 million pageviews on Pathways. Although the number of sessions varies over time, this reflects a slight upward trend.

Figure 1 Number of pageviews on nice.org from October 2019 - October 2020

Figure 2 Number of pageviews on NICE Pathways from October 2019 - October 2020

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