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PRESS RELEASE

Setting standards for ECT use in England and Wales

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has issued guidance on the use of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). In summary the guidance recommends that:

- ECT is used only to achieve rapid and short-term improvement of severe symptoms after other treatment options have failed and/or when the condition is considered to be potentially life-threatening, in individuals with:
 - severe depressive illness
 - catatonia
 - a prolonged or severe manic episode.
- The decision to use ECT should be made jointly by the individual and the clinician(s) responsible for treatment, on the basis of an informed discussion.
- Valid consent should be obtained in all cases where the individual has the ability to grant or refuse consent. Consent should be obtained without pressure or coercion, and the individual should be reminded of their right to withdraw consent at any point.

Professor Peter Littlejohns, Clinical Director and Executive Lead for this

appraisal said, “This guidance is good news for service users and health professionals. There is now clear national guidance on ECT use and on obtaining consent to the procedure. NICE is aware that some service users have concerns

about the use of ECT and our guidance has taken into account the full range of views and directly addresses some of the main concerns.”

NICE develops guidance for the NHS in England and Wales. Technologies have often been referred where there is uncertainty as to their value and use; ECT has been used for around 70 years, and has continuously sparked debate about its value. National guidance from NICE is used to help end this uncertainty and ensures that both the NHS and patients are clear about where the technology can add value.

Commenting Andrew Dillon, Chief Executive of NICE, said, “Today’s guidance will help patients and those who treat them, better understand the benefits and risks of ECT, and in doing so, reduce the uncertainty surrounding the use of what has been a controversial technique.”

The launch of the guidance coincides with the launch of an accreditation programme for health professionals who use ECT developed by the Royal College of Psychiatrists Research Unit.

Speaking about the accreditation service, Professor Littlejohns added, “The accreditation programme means that standards can be raised further by ensuring that not only are health professionals following NICE guidance, but they are properly trained and their practices have been peer reviewed.”

Professor Paul Lelliott, Director of the Royal College of Psychiatrists Research Unit, added, “The College has over many years campaigned to improve training and standards in the administration of ECT. The ECT accreditation service (ECTAS) will work towards satisfying these standards in a supportive and multidisciplinary way. ECTAS welcomes the standards on the administration of ECT contained in the NICE guidance and the endorsement it gives to the College handbook on ECT. ECTAS will incorporate the NICE standards into its appraisals of ECT clinics.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Media briefings

1. A media briefing is available to support this press release. If you received this press release by e-mail it is attached. If you would like to receive a copy by e-mail or fax - please contact NICE on the numbers above.

About NICE

2. 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.
3. 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 four 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).

3. 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 technology appraisals

4. Technology appraisals are recommendations on the use of new and existing medicines and treatments within the NHS in England and Wales, such as:
 - medicines (for example, drugs)
 - medical devices (for example, hearing aids or inhalers)
 - diagnostic techniques (tests used to identify diseases)
 - surgical procedures (for example, repairing hernias)
 - health promotion activities (for example, patient education models for diabetes).
5. Our technology appraisal recommendations are prepared by an independent Committee, who include healthcare professionals working in the NHS and people who are familiar with the issues affecting patients and carers. The Committee considers the evidence on the clinical and cost effectiveness of the technology – this includes hearing the views of, and evidence from, clinical health professionals, experts and patients.
6. NHS organisations in England and Wales have to make the resources and facilities available to enable NICE guidance to be implemented. In January 2002 the Government announced a legal obligation for the NHS to provide funding for treatments and drugs recommended by NICE as a part of its technology appraisals work programme