

Consistent Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) and Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) Advice on New Medicines for NHS Scotland

Context

The Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) and Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) both have a national and international reputation for the quality of their outputs. Both organisations provide guidance that is central to the provision of high quality, evidence based health care in Scotland.

Unlike SMC, the majority of recommendations made in SIGN guidelines relate to classes of medicines. However, a review of the 17 guidelines published during the years 2005 – 2007 (SIGN 81 TO SIGN 97) found specific recommendations on a total of 57 individual medicines. Over the same time period SMC have issued advice on over 400 medicines. On 10 occasions the recommendation/advice from SIGN and SMC has been for the same medicine for the same indication and on only one occasion was there conflict between SIGN and SMC, showing that conflicting advice is uncommon.

Although uncommon, conflicting advice is confusing for NHSScotland and patients. Therefore it has been agreed that there is a need for NHSScotland to receive consistent advice on new medicines. This has been welcomed by both the Chief Medical Officer and the Chair of NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, of which SIGN became part in 2005.

Ways of working

Processes for close communication between SIGN and SMC are in place in order to review the work programmes and identify areas of common interest as early as possible. This paper proposes further arrangements for managing situations where advice on the same medicine exists or is being developed in both organisations. The scenarios are:

1. SIGN recommendation is in existence before SMC advice is issued
2. SIGN and SMC are working on recommendation/advice at the same time
3. SMC advice is in existence before SIGN recommendation is issued
4. SMC advice is based on company non-submission

Within each of these scenarios there may be agreement on the recommendation/advice or disagreement. The flowchart below outlines the action to be taken in each scenario.

SMC and SIGN will use their existing communication mechanisms to ensure NHS Scotland is aware of the status of their respective guidance. This will require cross referencing of the SMC detailed advice document and SIGN guidelines appropriately. The communications are reflected in the flowchart.

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