

SMC Patient and Public Involvement

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Patients now expect to be involved in their own healthcare decisions and SMC has always recognised the importance of this.

From the outset, lay members were appointed to SMC and it was agreed that wider patient and public involvement was desirable. In July 2002, a Frequently Asked Questions Leaflet was published, containing information about SMC and its processes. The following month, the Patient and Public Involvement Group (PAPIG) was formalised as a subgroup of SMC specifically concerned with formulating public involvement strategy. Within SMC the culture is fully supportive of public involvement and PAPIG feeds back to SMC on a monthly basis.

By October 2002, PAPIG had confronted numerous challenges and developed a strategy that enables members of the public to contribute to SMC decision making by providing a relevant patient interest group with their individual contribution. This is then included within a greater body of collated evidence submitted to SMC by the patient interest group. In developing this strategy and designing supporting documents and processes, PAPIG worked closely with a number of patient interest groups. A 'Guidance Document for Patient Interest Groups' explains the process involved and is accompanied by a submission template.

Members of the public have been able to access the SMC work schedule since December 2002 by visiting the SMC website. At any given time, the website shows the SMC work programme for the following three months. In response to solicited feedback from users, the website schedule underwent a major revision in spring/summer 2003 making it more user friendly and an e-mail alert was introduced to notify users when any new medicine is placed on the SMC work schedule.

In order to provide patient interest groups with detailed information about a medicine that may be of interest to their members, pharmaceutical companies are able to submit a Patient Interest Group Summary. This is a lay version of their confidential submission to SMC. PAPIG has developed a cover sheet for such a summary to make it clear that SMC does not endorse the information contained within as it is only from the perspective of one pharmaceutical company.

Once a submission is made, no further communication can be entered into until the decision is in the public domain. Following feedback from users it was agreed in August 2003 that any patient interest group who makes a submission will automatically receive the relevant SMC press release.

PAPIG will continue to strengthen its public involvement strategy. For this purpose, a day-long event is planned and PAPIG will evaluate the impact of Patient Interest Group Summaries and survey patient interest groups who have not made submissions. It is proposed that a new lay member will be recruited to commence duties in January 2004, by which time PAPIG will have developed a training programme that is truly responsive to the needs of a lay member.

In conclusion, SMC have made, and will continue to make, every effort to meet all the criteria for good patient and public involvement and have been as open and transparent as possible within the constraints of confidentiality.