



A Briefing for NHS Specialist Nurses Department of Health Proposals for Urology Products and Services

Summary

The Department of Health (DH) is reviewing the prices the NHS pays for items listed in Part IX of the Drug Tariff – catheter, incontinence, and stoma items – and the way in which payments for services are calculated. The Urology Trade Association (UTA) – along with many patient and user organisations - is deeply concerned about the impact of these proposals on patient wellbeing and choice.

Context

Part IX of the Drug Tariff sets out what dispensing appliance contractors, pharmacy contractors and dispensing doctors will be reimbursed for an appliance supplied against an NHS prescription. It lists more than 5,000 stoma and incontinence products. The 2005 spend on these items by the NHS is about £200 million a year. The DH proposals would have reduced reimbursement for the cost of appliances to the NHS by £25million that year.

The Department's key objectives are to:

- maintain, and where applicable improve, the current quality of care to patients and provide a consistent level of care
- ensure equitable payment for equivalent services
- achieve clear transparency between what is paid for services and what is reimbursed for items
- secure value for money for the NHS

We commend the DH on setting these objectives, but believe that the current approach cannot achieve them. If the proposed price reductions are implemented, it could lead to large scale withdrawal of products, reduction in patient services, increased demands on healthcare professionals and a decline in research and development.

Product Pricing

The DH proposes two price reduction models:

- Option 1: Revise the product classification but cap reductions at 35%
- Option 2: Apply a uniform 12% reduction in current reimbursement prices

The proposed new product prices represent significant reductions and are to be based on classification within an imposed category-based system. The sheer size of the proposed price cuts will mean that many products will no longer be economically viable to produce and so stifle innovation.

There are also serious errors in the classification of products. For example, high quality, single-use catheters have been classified alongside reusable PVC catheters, priced at a low level. Serious concerns have been raised with the Department about misclassifications, such as listing latex products as non-latex, which could directly endanger patients' lives. We suggest that if product classifications have been so misinformed, the process is completely undermined.

The Department's emphasis on cost – not value for money - ignores the contribution to users' quality of life made by technically advanced products, and the value to the NHS of avoiding repeated medical consultations or health complications.

If the proposals were implemented, companies could be forced to end the supply of many specialist lines - likely to be the most innovative and technologically advanced appliances – as they would be no longer viable; causing serious disruption to users who have grown to rely on these more advanced products.

Discontinuation of large numbers of appliances would also generate a major task for specialist nurses to whom patients would turn for assessment

and recommendations of alternative products. We are concerned that the Department has not considered the implications of their proposals for specialist nurse workloads or assessed the need to fund additional nursing posts to cover this activity.

The proposed changes to the prices would have a significant direct cost to suppliers. We are deeply concerned that, if the Department continues with its proposals, future investment in product development will be impossible; innovation will be stifled and patients will suffer.

Patient Services

The DH proposes a capped, banded payment structure for service provision, which is potentially at least 50% lower than the current service payment. This proposal could force some home delivery services to cease trading as it would be no longer possible to cover the costs involved in supplying patients' products.

People with a neurological disease or injury have complex needs, which often change during the course of their lifetime; at least 45% of users with these conditions will rely on the provision of services offered by appliance contractors in the form of supply and home delivery of continence appliances, specialist advice, and support.

Good continence management and the support such people currently get from appliance contractors enables them to maintain their independence and quality of life as well as contributing greatly towards them being able to sustain, or even gain, employment.

Such support will be severely impacted if the Department implements these changes.

What Can Nurses Do?

The Urology Trade Association is in contact with the Department of Health directly as well as parliamentarians and patient groups. The organisation is committed to finding an outcome which preserves services to all patients and ensures the future supply of high quality, innovative urology appliances. But we cannot achieve this alone. Specialist nurses are in the front line in supporting patients to manage their continence conditions.

Your views are vital to inform the Department's final decision. We hope you will find the time to voice them.

1. Contact Your MP

You can write to your MP outlining your concern about the impact of the Department's proposals on patient care and wellbeing. Ask them to raise these concerns with the Minister.

If you are unsure who your MP is, this information is available at:

<http://www.upmystreet.com/commons/> or by calling 020 7219 4272.

All MPs can be reached at: House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.

2. Write to the Minister

The Health Minister, Dawn Primarolo MP, is ultimately responsible for the Department's consultation and any final decision on patient care and services. You can address your letter to:

Dawn Primarolo MP
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall, London SW1

4. Respond to the Department

The Department of Health's consultation document is available online via www.dh.gov.uk

Anyone can respond. The Department has requested that views on the proposals be sent to:

Gita Fox, Part IX Consultation
Department of Health
5th Floor, New King's Beam House
22 Upper Ground
London SE1 9BW

Or emailed to:

primaryandacute.part9@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Urology Trade Association

The Urology Trade Association (UTA) is a new organisation currently representing more than 95% of the urology appliance manufacturing and supply market. The Association was established to act as a forum for debate and a vehicle for action on issues relating to the provision of urology products and services to patients.

Current members include:

Jade-Euro-Med
Coloplast
DBT Medical Limited
Bard Limited
Astra Tech Ltd
JLJ Healthcare Ltd
Beambridge Medical
Rochester Medical Ltd
Manfred Sauer
Hunter Urology Limited
Unomedical Ltd

More Information

Richard Robinson, UTA Secretariat
richard.robinson@whitehouseconsulting.co.uk
Tel.: 020 7463 0696

105 Southbank House
Black Prince Rd
London SE1 7SJ

For more information about Continence UK, please visit: www.continence-uk.com