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# Procuring quality medicines

Recent changes to quality assurance assessment of licensed medicines were among the topics discussed at the Procurement and Distribution Interest Group of the Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists' autumn symposium. Matthew Wright reports

Quality assurance (QA) assessment of licensed medicines is currently moving away from a focus on laboratory analysis, towards more of a risk assessment approach, Richard Bateman, quality assurance specialist pharmacist, London region, told attendees.

"Over the past few years we have really developed and formalised the way we get QA input into the procurement process," he said. There is now more of a focus on identifying the potential for medication errors and ensuring that products are safe in use.

Mr Bateman explained that this new focus was linked to the introduction of the Supply Chain Excellence Programme, which led to the development of a nationally co-ordinated approach and the concept of "purchasing for safety". A contract award criteria has been established which links in with QA assessment processes, he explained.

Mr Bateman said that a better relationship has now developed between QA and procurement pharmacists, the NHS Procurement and Supply Agency (NHS PASA), and the National Patient Safety Agency. The NHS Pharmaceutical Quality Assurance Committee produces guidance documents for the NHS, including "Quality assurance and risk assessment of licensed medicines for the NHS", published in 2004. Mr Bateman added that a procurement subcommittee was formed to manage the QA assessment process.

The assessment process largely considers safety of medicines in use, he said. Product samples (or an accurate mock-up) are allocated to QA pharmacists across the UK for assessment. An overall assessment, comments and images are collated and presented for adjudication. Risk assessment of pharmaceuticals being evaluated for NHS contracts includes consideration of issues such as medication error potential (eg, products with

similar appearance or names), product quality and fitness for purpose (eg, ease of opening) and manufacturer performance assessment (eg, reliability, number of recalls).

## Collaborative hubs

Chris Theaker, newly appointed director of procurement, pharmaceuticals, at NHS PASA, described how the Collaborative Procurement Hubs (CPH) project is working with trusts and confederations in a phased approach to develop CPHs across the NHS that provide a regional procurement focus. He said that procurement hubs would be become more formal in structure. "By 2008 we anticipate there being national coverage in terms of procurement groups . . . to coincide more with the 10 strategic health authority boundaries," he added.

He said that CPHs are designed to provide a consistent approach to purchasing, provide a resource for sourcing and supply chain development, drive value and engage with stakeholders throughout the whole commercial process. "I hope that those of you who are working in the NHS would be aware of . . . where the hubs are evolving, who the contact points are and how your local procurement organisation would fit into the hub structure," he added.

## New NHS specials database

A decision support tool to help NHS pharmacy staff identify and source unlicensed

products made by NHS manufacturing units was previewed by Tim Root, specialist pharmacist, clinical governance and technical services for London, East and South East specialist pharmacy services.

The web-based Pro-File database contains a product list, which currently stands at about 2,500 lines, and includes core data for all products that are being manufactured and used by the NHS. Mr Root said that Pro-File will offer would-be purchasers a list of contact details of all manufacturers on the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's register of manufacturers holding a special licence.

Mr Root said: "Access to Pro-File is by registration and only *bona fide* NHS pharmacy staff with an NHS e-mail address are eligible to register. The site will only include product data from NHS manufacturing units and will not be accessible outside the NHS."

He also made it clear that Pro-File is not an ordering system and that the final decision about what to buy and from where is entirely the purchaser's.

NHS manufacturing units currently have access to the database and are in the process of adding their inventories.

"The quality and scope of the product-specific information, such as pack size, label details, excipient details and formulation information, is entirely down to the manufacturer; there is an expectation that all licensed NHS manufacturers will contribute their data," Mr Root said.

## Innovation in pharmacologistics award

During the symposium, the 2006 Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists' "Innovation in pharmacologistics" award, sponsored by Pfizer, was presented to Kirsty Docherty (pictured).

Ms Docherty, procurement services manager at University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, is to use the £1,500 prize money to undertake a review into the purchasing and contracting practices of medicines consortia when dealing with branded medicines.

She aims to develop a range of key performance indicators that can be used throughout the UK.



The autumn symposium of the Procurement and Distribution Interest Group of the Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists was held in Coventry on 2 November 2006. **Matthew Wright** is news and feature writer for *The Pharmaceutical Journal*. Procurement of pharmaceuticals was the subject of last month's *Hospital Pharmacist Special Feature* (2006;13:391-403).