

PRESS RELEASE

Following a planned review NICE decides to withdraw its hearing aid guidance.

NICE provides independent guidance on treatments and care for those using the NHS in England and Wales and is committed to ensuring that its guidance is robust, relevant and updated in response to changes in the evidence base.

In July 2000 NICE issued guidance to the NHS on hearing aids. This guidance encouraged the NHS to make full use of the available range of analogue aids, but was more cautious about the newer digital aids. The guidance recognised that hearing aid technology was evolving rapidly and looked forward to the evaluation of NHS digital aid pilot sites which were, at that time, being established.

The guidance review was planned for July 2002 but was postponed so that the results from the digital pilots sites could be taken into account. More recently, the Department of Health and the Welsh Assembly Government have decided to roll out digital hearing aid technology across the NHS and following review the Institute has therefore decided to withdraw its current guidance.

Andrew Dillon, Chief Executive of NICE says “Digital hearing aids are a proven technology and are already widely available. The decision to roll out digital aids across the NHS means that our guidance no longer applies and we are therefore advising the NHS that it is being withdrawn.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors

1. 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.
2. 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.
4. In July 2000 NICE issued guidance to the NHS on hearing aids (<http://www.nice.org.uk/cat.asp?c=6967>) . This guidance made recommendations about the use of analogue aids and highlighted that there was not enough robust scientific evidence to support the nationwide introduction of digital hearing aids at that time. The guidance recognised that hearing aid technology was evolving rapidly and that planned NHS evaluations of digital aids, through the Modernising Hearing Aid Pilots, would provide valuable information. NICE was clear that once these pilots / evaluations were complete it would review its guidance.
5. The digital hearing aid pilots are complete and evaluation has demonstrated that they were successful.
6. The Institute's Chief Executive has written to the NHS, withdrawing the July 2000 guidance and highlighting the NHS extension of the digital pilots.
7. NICE will now focus its resources on developing guidance in areas of healthcare where there is greater uncertainty about the benefits and effectiveness of treatments.