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NHS European Office: policy priorities 2009

The NHS European Office is part of the NHS Confederation and funded by the Strategic Health Authorities. It has been established to represent NHS organisations in England to EU decision-makers, through monitoring and engaging with EU policy and legislative developments that have an impact on the NHS as a provider and commissioner of services, as an employer and as a business. This paper gives an overview of the main policy priorities for the Office in 2009.

Patient mobility

The European Commission has published proposals aiming to clarify the rights of patients to travel to other EU countries to receive medical treatment and the responsibilities of health systems to facilitate and fund this. The proposals, which may have significant implications for the NHS in terms of financial and capacity planning, and increased administrative burdens, are now going through the EU decision-making process. The NHS European Office is working closely with NHS organisations to ensure that NHS interests are represented and taken into account by European decision-makers.

Patient safety and HCAI

The European Commission has launched a 'patient safety package', which includes a Recommendation and a Communication on patient safety and the prevention of healthcare associated infections. The aim of these initiatives is to propose measures to help prevent the spread of infections and to improve safety and quality of care throughout the EU. The NHS European Office will feed in NHS experiences and will seek to ensure that proposals are in line with ongoing NHS initiatives in these areas.

Public procurement and competition

The NHS European Office will brief NHS trusts on EU initiatives concerning public procurement and competition policy. The Office will promote EU guidance to boost 'green' public procurement to NHS trusts and will advise them on new law on public procurement of clean vehicles. It will also assess the impact of EU competition rules on NHS activity and will provide guidance to NHS bodies on where they may be considered to be engaged in 'economic activity' and consequently subject to the provisions of EU competition law.

Research and innovation

2009 is the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. In light of this and the NHS' new priorities in research and innovation, the NHS European Office will monitor developments in this area and advise on opportunities to access EU funding which NHS organisations with a research and development interest can apply for and participate in.

Information on pharmaceutical drugs

The European Commission is reviewing legislation governing what information pharmaceutical companies can provide to the public on prescription-only medicines. The proposed legislation aims to address the increasing demand by patients for information on medicinal products, to reduce the risk of patients accessing misleading and poor-quality information, and to mitigate unequal access to information for patients across the EU. While the proposals aim to ensure greater access for patients across the EU to balanced, reliable and unbiased information on medicinal products, some concerns have been raised about the risk of pressures on prescribers and prescribing budgets. The NHS European Office will work with stakeholders throughout the legislative process to represent NHS interests with a view to achieving a balanced outcome.

Energy and environment

Recently proposed revisions to the Energy Performance in Buildings Directive seek to improve minimum energy efficiency requirements for new and existing buildings and require the public sector to play a leading role in promoting energy efficiency. The proposals may have a considerable impact on the NHS as a major energy consumer with a large infrastructure. The European Commission has also proposed revisions to existing EU legislation on industrial pollution. The proposals aim to strengthen and extend the scope of the existing law to cover smaller combustion installations. This could have new implications for around 70 NHS hospitals. In liaison with NHS organisations, the NHS European Office is working to shape a response to these proposals and to push for changes to be introduced, as required.

Employment

Working with the NHS Employers European team the NHS European Office will continue to monitor developments in relation to EU employment policy and law. The Office is engaged in developments including an EU consultation on the health workforce, legal proposals to revise the existing EU Directive on maternity leave, and potential proposals for new health and safety at work legislation to protect healthcare workers from blood-borne infections due to needle stick injuries. The NHS European Office will consider the potential implications of each of these proposals on the NHS and will engage with them as required.

Organ donation and transplantation

The European Commission has published legal proposals on the quality and safety of transplant processes. The proposals aim to ensure consistently high standards throughout the EU, with scope for each country to implement them as appropriate to their own system. Alongside a draft Directive, the Commission has produced an action plan aiming to increase the availability of organs for donation, by sharing best practice and enhancing the efficiency of transplantation systems. The NHS European Office will continue working with key stakeholders including NHS Blood and Transplant to ensure that, as far as possible, developments in this area complement existing arrangements in the UK.

Further information

www.nhsconfed.org/europe

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