



NIHR Health Technology Assessment programme

NHS

*National Institute for
Health Research*

Identifying and prioritising HTA research



Identifying evidence gaps

The HTA programme produces independent research information on the effectiveness, costs and broader impact of healthcare treatments and tests to meet the needs of those who plan, provide or receive care in the NHS. The programme identifies areas of genuine uncertainty by:

- ▶ consulting directly with key stakeholders within the NHS and NIHR and with external organisations;
- ▶ extracting research recommendations from high quality evidence syntheses;
- ▶ inviting direct suggestions through the HTA website;
- ▶ inviting researchers to submit proposals.

The programme consults directly with people and organisations who are most likely to know about evidence gaps that need to be filled. This includes policy-makers and

organisations representing either health professionals (e.g. Royal Colleges and research networks) or patients and carers (e.g. charities and support groups). They are also invited to make suggestions for research topics or submit proposals to the researcher-led funding stream.

The HTA programme also systematically scans important research resources to identify recommendations for research to fill the evidence gaps in the NHS. These include the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), and completed reviews from the Cochrane Library and Clinical Evidence. Other important sources include the National Horizon Scanning Centre which looks for new technologies that are likely to be available to the NHS within the next few years, and the Database of Uncertainties about the Effects of Treatments (DUETs) that identifies areas of uncertainty within health research.

Submitting suggestions

The HTA programme encourages patients, the public, policy-makers and individuals working in the wider NHS to suggest topics for research individually or as members of a group. An electronic form is available from www.hta.ac.uk/suggest, which includes help screens to assist in refining suggestions.

Prioritising research topics

Deciding which of the many research suggestions received should be given priority is one of the most important tasks of the HTA programme. It is essential to its success that research priorities are chosen in a clear and fair way, embracing the latest expertise, knowledge and opinion.

The HTA programme is supported in this work by expert advisory panels which consist of both lay members and clinical experts, who ensure that research funded by the programme is highly relevant to the needs of the NHS.

From 2009 the HTA programme's advisory panels will increase from four to six, with the Therapeutic Procedures Panel being replaced by three new panels. An HTA Clinical Evaluation and Trials Prioritisation Group is also being created to focus on research proposals received through the researcher-led funding stream.

Diagnostic Technologies and Screening Panel examines research suggestions relating to screening and diagnostic technologies.

Disease Prevention Panel focuses on research to promote health, prevent disease and reduce health inequalities.

External Devices and Physical Therapies Panel covers a wide range of physical therapies, rehabilitative interventions and external devices.

Interventional Procedures Panel covers procedures which involve entering the body (e.g. surgery), that are used for diagnosis or treatment.

Pharmaceuticals Panel looks at drugs and the prescribing of them.

Psychological and Community Therapies Panel focuses on interventions in the areas of mental health, learning disability, dementia and primary care.



The role of panel members

Considering suggestions

All suggestions received by the HTA programme are carefully considered. Each suggestion is checked to ensure that it falls within the remit of the programme and has not already been covered by another research proposal. Suggestions are then allocated to the most appropriate panel to decide which should be taken forward.

Panel members pay particular attention to the burden of the health problem and its cost, the degree of current uncertainty, and the urgency and cost of the research.

Vignettes

Detailed briefing papers (vignettes) are prepared on those suggestions that are prioritised after initial consideration.

The vignette provides more detail about the suggestion. It clarifies the research question and the extent of the health problem. This allows the advisory panel, at a future meeting

to give the suggestion more informed consideration.

Prioritisation Strategy Group (PSG)

Research priorities decided by the expert advisory panels are finally agreed by the Prioritisation Strategy Group. The agreed priorities are then taken on by the commissioning team who advertise for research teams to carry out the work.

The group is also responsible for making ultimate funding decisions based on the recommendations it receives from the HTA Commissioning Board and the HTA Clinical Evaluation and Trials Board.

Wider communication

The HTA programme communicates widely with other research funders to ensure no duplication of research effort. This involves liaising closely with key people in the NHS and organisations such as the Cochrane Collaboration.



Criteria for setting priorities

The HTA programme looks to prioritise research where there is a clear question to answer, addressing a number of criteria summarised below.

1) What are the benefits in terms of reduced uncertainty?

This could concern:

- ▶ outcomes for patients
- ▶ (population-based) cost-effectiveness to the NHS
- ▶ targeting of services
- ▶ methodological gains through performing the assessment.

2) How long before benefits could be realised, bearing in mind time taken to perform the assessment and affect a change in practice?

3) Would the assessment offer value for money?

4) How important is an early assessment?

5) Other factors including policy considerations, prevalence of the condition and social/ethical concerns.





The HTA programme is part of the National Institute for Health Research. It is managed by the NIHR Coordinating Centre for Health Technology Assessment (NCCHTA), part of the NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre (NETSCC), based at the University of Southampton.

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