

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

**Paper for information:
Health Development Agency (HDA) Update on Nutrition
Initiatives**

Agenda item: 8

Please see attached paper for information.

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Update on the work of the Health Development Agency (HDA)

The HDA was created following publication of The White Paper, *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation* (1999) which signalled the need to build the evidence base in public health, with a special focus on reducing inequalities in health. The DH Research and Development Strategy (2001) also identified the task for the HDA as ‘maintaining an up to date map of the evidence base of public health and health improvement, advising on the setting of standards in the light of evidence, for public health and health promotion practice, and effective and authoritative dissemination of evidence to practitioners’.

A new direction of work for the HDA is Evidence into Practice. This work has developed as a consequence of the 2001-2002 annual review of the HDA where it was agreed that the HDA would: “develop a more systematic approach to disseminating evidence and guidance and ... facilitate changes in front line practice”. This work will involve three stages; the collation and synthesis of evidence, description of current practice in areas identified from research as effective; and support for the implementation of recommendations in practice with both organisations and practitioners using effective change management techniques.

Weight management

- The HDA has recently completed a synthesis of the evidence in relation to weight management, entitled ‘Weight management: an analysis of reviews of diet, physical activity and behavioural approaches’. This synthesis is currently awaiting final approval for publication from the Department of Health and the HDA’s obesity reference group. This reference group is made up of key experts and practitioners in the field of weight management and the HDA has worked with them closely on the production of this synthesis.
- This synthesis of the evidence:
 - identifies all relevant systematic reviews, syntheses and meta-analyses;
 - reviews these papers and highlight ‘what works’ to prevent and treat overweight and obesity, and maintain weight loss for all population groups;
 - highlights conflicting evidence, gaps in the evidence and provides a steer for future research commissioning.
 - This document will also be routinely updated when new evidence is available.
- The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) and the HDA have been tasked by the Department of Health to work collaboratively to develop

guidance on the identification, prevention and management of obesity and maintenance of weight reduction. NICE has examined the effectiveness of orlistat, sibutramine and surgery for the treatment of obesity and have issued recommendations and clinical guidance. It is anticipated that the guidance will be available in 2005.

- This “evidence into practice” work will draw together practitioners from a broad spectrum of sectors to enable delivery and implementation of the weight management evidence-based guidance. The HDA will also have a role in facilitating and supporting changes in practice for those practitioners/organisations implementing the guidelines.

Low birth weight

- The HDA has published a synthesis of the evidence entitled ‘Prevention of low birth weight: assessing the effectiveness of smoking cessation and nutritional interventions’. Copies of the report and summary are available to SACN members.
- Like the weight management synthesis, this briefing paper is a review of the systematic review literature. It highlights conflicting evidence, gaps in the evidence and provides a steer for future research commissioning.
- It was agreed by the reference group that within the review level evidence for nutrition interventions, there was not enough evidence of effectiveness (the only effective intervention being calcium supplementation especially for pregnant women at risk of hypertensive disorders) to take forward into evidence into practice. Furthermore, for smoking cessation, the effect size was not substantial plus there was a lack of evidence in terms of tackling inequalities.
- Therefore, the HDA will develop the evidence base for the prevention of low birth weight by consulting with key stakeholders and practitioners to elicit promising practice ‘from the field’. This process will provide information on examples of promising practice, and will not be geared towards the production of guidance.
- The reference group suggested that Sure Start projects would be a good start for this work as they are based in areas of high deprivation. However, other practice based interventions, other than Sure Start will also be investigated. This may include any intervention that has the potential to reduce low birth weight. For example, nutrition, smoking, substance misuse, psycho-social factors, etc.
- Broader upstream determinants of low birth weight will be investigated, such as national policy, income and education. This will be done in conjunction with other HDA topic reference groups, who have also expressed an interest in looking at possible upstream interventions.

Breastfeeding

- The HDA has published an evidence briefing of the effectiveness of public health interventions to promote the initiation of breastfeeding. This work was undertaken in collaboration with the Mother and Infant Research Unit,

University of Leeds. Copies of the report and summary are available to SACN members.

- With the full support of the breastfeeding reference group, the HDA are planning to develop this work further to evidence into practice and the production of guidance. This will involve four processes:
 - Gathering of information of effective best practice from the evidence base. This will involve looking back at the original studies of effective interventions to elicit the process and context. The internal and external validity and transferability of the intervention will be investigated.
 - Collation and description of current best practice obtained from practitioners. This will involve consulting with key stakeholders and practitioners to elicit promising practice 'from the field'.
 - Support for the implementation of practice recommendations, i.e. to encourage the change process.
 - Evidence and practice development collaboration centres for Child and Maternal Nutrition will also be set up. These centres will collaborate with the HDA to achieve some of the major recommendations, which emerge from this work. These centres will be based externally to the HDA and could be situated for example in an organisation, institution, academic department or as a consortium.
- This work will support the NHS Priorities and Planning Framework (2003-6) target for breastfeeding initiation.
- The HDA have commissioned the Mother and Infant Research Unit, University of Leeds to update the systematic review on the effectiveness of interventions to promote breastfeeding duration. This work has a broader scope beyond the published *Encouraging women to breastfeed* (Renfrew *et al.*, 2000 A review of practices which promote or inhibit breastfeeding – with evidence-based guidance for practice. London: The Stationery Office) as it will also examine public health as well as clinical interventions. This review will be completed by mid-2004.

Other related HDA evidence base topic areas

- **Physical activity** - The HDA is also currently building the evidence base of effective interventions to increase physical activity, as well as translating this evidence into practice guidelines.