

From The Chief Medical Officer:  
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To: Consultants in Otorhinolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery  
Chief Executives of Trusts  
Medical Directors of Trusts  
DPHs of Boards

HSS(MD)6/2001

1 February 2001

Dear Colleague

***SINGLE USE INSTRUMENTS FOR TONSILLECTOMY AND ADENOIDECTOMY***

In line with the rest of the United Kingdom, the DHSSPS has accepted the expert advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) and will introduce single use instruments for tonsil surgery during 2001, to further minimise the theoretical risk of transmission of vCJD in hospitals.

We are following SEAC's advice in introducing single use instruments for tonsillectomy operations at this stage because this is a specific procedure usually applied to children and which involves a discrete set of instruments. In London there have been discussions between the BAO-HNS, the Department of Health and manufacturers, but there will be a delay before all the instruments become available.

This issue was discussed at a recent meeting of the SAC Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery where it was agreed that in the interim, consultants should decide on a case by case basis, in discussion with the patient or the parents of the patient, whether to proceed with surgery or to defer it until single use instruments become available. We are aware that the President of the BAO-HNS has written to members advising them that procedures should continue where there are definite indications for surgery, for example, in cases of possibly malignancy or significant airway obstruction. In such cases the benefits of surgery considerably outweighs the theoretical risk of vCJD.

I should stress that introducing single use instruments is a precautionary measure against a theoretical risk. Nevertheless, for the moment it will be for surgeons to agree with individual patients and parents as to whether a tonsillectomy procedure should be deferred. This will depend on the clinical needs of the patients balanced against any theoretical risk of vCJD. For those patients who require an urgent tonsillectomy, we will move as rapidly as possible to secure a supply of single use instruments for this purpose. We will keep you advised of progress towards this.

Yours sincerely



**HENRIETTA CAMPBELL (Dr)**

cc Miss Hill  
General Medical Practitioners  
Regional Supplies Service



Hidden cc

Secretary  
Paul Simpson  
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