

From the Acting Chief Medical Officer:
Dr Ian Carson

HSS(MD) 9/2006



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

An Roinn

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

To: Chief Executives, HSS Trusts
Chief Executives, HSS Boards (*to disseminate
to DoPH, CCDC, Directors of Acute Services*)
Trust Medical Directors (*to disseminate*)
Trust Medical Directors (*to disseminate*)
Directors of Public Health
Consultant Microbiologists
Infection Control Doctors
Infection Control Nurses

cc: RACCDC
HCAI Action Plan Group
Director, CDSC(NI)
Chief Executive, Health Promotion Agency
Chief Executive, Health Estates Agency
Health and Social Services Councils
NI Healthcare-Associated Infection Surveillance
Centre
DHSSPS Principal Information Officer

Date: 23 March 2006

Dear Colleague,

Changing the Culture: An Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Healthcare Associated Infections (HCAIs) in Northern Ireland 2006/2009

You will be aware that in September 2004 the Chief Medical Officer commissioned the development of an infection control strategy for Northern Ireland to take particular account of the key priority areas of prevention, surveillance, staff education and training, governance, monitoring and audit. In June 2005, the strategy document proceeded to consultation. An HCAI Action Plan Group was then convened to consider the responses focusing on the acute hospitals sector, although the principles apply across the HPSS.

The consequent plan, accessible at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hcai_action_plan.pdf has now received Ministerial approval and was launched at the Healthcare Associated Infection conference at the Stormont Hotel on 13 March 2006. Of relevance also at the conference was the announcement of the Minister's agreement to sign Northern Ireland up to the World Health Organisation's Global Patient Safety Challenge Pledge *Clean Care is Safer Care* which is an important opportunity to give clean care, and specifically hand hygiene, a high profile within our hospitals and health care settings and for Northern Ireland to participate in a global initiative.

The enclosed action plan has 37 action points and is intended to last 3 years in the first instance. The time frame is a reflection of the need for concentrated effort in this area and should take the plan through the Review of Public Administration changes into the new health service structures. It majors on the areas of organisation and culture of healthcare organisations, education, training and practices, governance, accountability and audit, and public and patient partnership. Mandatory training for all staff and a hand hygiene campaign are key areas for healthcare staff and others. The final accountability for infection prevention and control will lie with Trust Chief Executives and significant new governance and accountability structures are proposed for health service organisations including (i) a designated Trust Infection Prevention and Control Lead and (ii) a Trust Infection Reduction Plan.

It should be noted that the implementation of actions commence during 2006 and it is therefore essential that activity begin soon. The Controls Assurance Standard issued in April 2004 in relation to infection control requiring Boards and Trusts to meet a range of standards is presently being updated to reflect this action plan.

Implementing *Changing the Culture* will require partnership working across all HPSS agencies, and Trusts and, in particular, will need to reprioritise resources to ensure funding for implementation. For its part the Department, recognising the importance of this issue, will be making a small amount of funding available to kick-start implementation. Recurrent funding will be made available during 2006 to recruit a regional surveillance coordinator at the Healthcare-associated Infection Surveillance Centre (HISC) and the remaining recurrent budget available will be divided amongst Boards to fund enhancements in infection control, and Trust staffing and surveillance arrangements. In addition, some non-recurrent funding will be directed towards a regional hand washing/infection control campaign in Trusts based on the WHO guidelines (copy enclosed and accessible at http://www.who.int/patientsafety/events/05/HH_en.pdf) with the remaining non-recurrent funding being provided to Trusts to facilitate mandatory infection prevention and control training (however from 2007/08 onwards, the HPSS will be expected to incorporate infection control within its normal induction and training programmes).

Although implementation of the plan will be monitored, in the first instance, through the Controls Assurance Standard on Infection Control, there is an important role for the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). It will monitor regulated services, including those provided by the independent sector, against care standards (which include infection control as an integral element, where appropriate). RQIA may issue improvement notices or ultimately withhold registration where there is continuing failure to meet the required standard. In addition, RQIA has a duty to report to the Department on the provision, availability and quality of care across all sectors and will use the *Quality in Health and Social Care Standards* to make this assessment. One of the criteria under Theme 2 *Safe and Effective Care* is on promotion of general hygiene standards, and prevention, control and reduction in the incidence of healthcare associated infection and communicable disease. HSS Boards and Trusts will be required to demonstrate how they are complying.

Safety has to be the first concern of everyone who works in or manages the HPSS as it is an integral part of quality in health and social care. Effective care, therefore, has to place an emphasis on efforts to improve safety processes in order to prevent adverse outcomes, and to improve the service user and carer experience. This includes how organisations address HCAs. Within the next month, the Department will be publishing *Safety First: a framework for sustainable improvement in the HPSS* which is designed to provide a cohesive and consistent approach to safety.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ian Carson
Acting Chief Medical Officer