Effective information for managing medicines

A Strategy for the UK Medicines Information Network in the NHS
Executive summary

- The UK Medicines Information Service (UKMi) is a critical NHS resource for medicines management at patient and organisational levels. It is a specialist pharmacy service that provides high-level, evidence-based, information and advice about medicines across the full range of clinical disciplines. It is provided through an integrated network of local and regional medicines information centres.
- ‘Effective Information for Managing Medicines’ builds on the previous strategy for UKMi published in 2000. It takes account of political, policy and organisational change within the NHS.
- The strategy details five principal aims for UKMi:
  - Reflect a patient-focused NHS
  - Develop the service to healthcare providers
  - Develop healthcare staff
  - Support to NHS commissioning and planning bodies
  - Collaborate effectively with other organisations at national level
- The aims support key issues underpinning organisational change within the NHS, namely:
  - Patient safety
  - Patient access to good quality care
  - Cost-effective prescribing
  - A competent work force
  - Value for money
- To achieve these aims, UKMi must maintain a networked way of working but be sensitive to different policy developments and priorities across the devolved Governments. The network provides a strong culture of collegiate excellence, an infrastructure of collective knowledge and skills, and robust standards of practice.
- UKMi must work with NHS managers and commissioners to enable this strategy to be delivered.
A Strategy for the UK Medicines Information Network in the NHS

What is the UK Medicines Information Service (UKMi)?

The safe, effective and economical use of medicines is a priority for the NHS. Important health gains for patients can be achieved from the appropriate use of medicines. However, it is also important to manage the potential risks in terms of inappropriate use, safety and adverse effects. As part of a team effort, medicines management requires specialist knowledge and input from practitioners who have an advanced understanding of therapeutics, and of the pharmaceutical, behavioural, economic and other aspects of medicines’ use. This knowledge is available through the UK Medicines Information service (UKMi).

UKMi is an NHS service provided through an integrated network of local and regional medicines information centres. Medicines information is a speciality within Pharmacy that provides high-level evidence-based information and advice about medicines across the full range of clinical disciplines.

UKMi is a critical resource for medicines management in the NHS -

• At the patient level - advising front-line clinical staff on the care of individual patients - providing expert advice for clinical problem-solving where medicines are involved.
• At the organisational level - taking the lead in local and national developments, such as evaluation of medicines, horizon scanning, guideline production and training.
• For clinical and information governance - supporting patient safety and management of risks associated with medicines.

UKMi is co-ordinated nationally whilst remaining locally-based and responsive to local needs. Medicines Information staff are located in, and employed by, the pharmacy departments of most NHS Trust hospitals (approximately 250 such departments in total), and in each region and country of the UK. (A full list of national/regional contacts is provided inside the cover of the British National Formulary, and on the back cover of this publication.)

Why is this strategy needed?

The aim of this strategy is to help the NHS recognise the expertise available in UKMi and facilitate productive working relationships with individuals and organisations to meet the medicines management agenda, locally and nationally. This will maximise benefits to the NHS in terms of efficiency, quality and responsiveness. It builds on the previous strategy (Better Information for Managing Medicines) that sought to extend the service beyond its historical secondary care focus to a broader base, which included primary care.

This strategy identifies current priorities for future developments, building on the strong foundation of the successful existing service. In revising the strategy, note has been taken of political and policy developments across the UK. These are outlined in the discussion document commissioned by UKMi: 'The NHS’s Strategic Policy Framework' which accompanies this strategy and is available through the UKMi website (www.ukmi.nhs.uk) or from the centres listed overleaf.

Some of the principal changes that will impact on the development of UKMi are:

• Increased access to health services and health information by patients.
• Development of intermediate care with transfer of complex cases into the community.
• Development of specialist networks.
• New non-traditional prescribers.
• New commissioning arrangements.
• Regulatory changes created to ensure life-long competency of practitioners.
• Plurality of healthcare providers from independent and charitable sectors (in England).
The Current UKMi Network

Medicines Information Services have been established in virtually every secondary care Trust in the UK in response to local demand for specialist medicines information. These services are integrated via the UKMi network, which has a strong culture of collegiate excellence and provides an infrastructure of collective knowledge and skills. The particular skill of the pharmacists and other professionals who provide these services is to link the provision of critically appraised information with clinical interpretation.

Working locally, UKMi members currently provide clinical advice and information in response to nearly half a million enquiries per year. An increasing number of these originate from primary care.

In parallel with local initiatives, UKMi has also developed at the regional level in England and Scotland, and nationally in Wales and Northern Ireland. There are now 16 centres working at this level providing leadership and frameworks for quality assurance and competency across the network. These centres work collaboratively to provide a national service and, in partnership with a number of national organisations (see Strategic Aim 5) to support the NHS.

Examples of this work include:

- Enhancing patient safety and patient access to information by working with patient agencies.
- Identifying and assessing new technologies and national guidance. This work has been commended by the Audit Commission.\(^3\)
- Producing evidence-based evaluations of new medicines to support medicines management committees. The Healthcare Commission has identified such work as good practice since individual Trusts would otherwise need to duplicate it at a local level with significant cost implications.\(^4\)

The entire network cooperates to provide a national service, while retaining strong local loyalties.

Some examples of the main areas of current work of UKMi are given in Table 1.

The service has substantial strengths:

- **Expertise** - it is uniquely placed to give clinical advice to healthcare professionals in response to enquiries about medicines and improve the care of individual patients, and to improve medicines use proactively by interpreting the published evidence.

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<tr>
<th>Locally</th>
<th>Regionally in England and Scotland; nationally in Wales and N Ireland</th>
<th>Nationally for whole NHS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Advisory and information services</strong> for health professionals and patients tailored to individual and organisational needs:</td>
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<td>• Influence direct patient care</td>
<td>• Resource and expertise to support local services</td>
<td>• Specialist advisory services (eg on medicines in pregnancy/lactation etc.)</td>
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<td>• Underpin clinical pharmacy services</td>
<td>• Support to primary care organisations on prescribing issues</td>
<td>• Referral for NHS Direct/NHS24 patients</td>
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<td>• Support effective prescribing</td>
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<td><strong>Clinical governance</strong></td>
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<td>• Risk management and prescribing guidelines</td>
<td>• Quality assurance of local MI services</td>
<td>• Develop standards for professional practice and resources to support practitioners within the UKMi network (eg MiDatabank)</td>
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<td>• Support for information governance</td>
<td>• Respond to commissioning and service issues as identified by service users</td>
<td>• Implementation of a national research strategy</td>
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<td>• Advice on medicines management, including support to D&amp;TCS, formularies, PGDs etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education and training</strong> for healthcare professionals including medicines information skills, therapeutics etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pre-registration and junior pharmacists</td>
<td>• MI workforce</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Nursing and junior medical staff</td>
<td>• NHS Direct</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Training resources (MI Workbook, MiCAL)</td>
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<td><strong>Other activities</strong></td>
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<td>• Facilitating adverse drug reaction reporting</td>
<td>• Development and provision of content for the National electronic Library for Medicines, including a daily news service, and maintaining a library of high quality evidence about medicines eg Medicines Q &amp; As</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Horizon scanning: predicting the impact of new medicines and national guidance</td>
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<td>• Evidence based evaluations of new medicines before and after launch</td>
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Table 1: Examples of current UKMi activities
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- **Impartiality** - it is funded entirely by the NHS, and rigorously maintains its independence from commercial and other special interests.
- **Responsiveness** - the service is accessible to local clinicians, other health professionals and the public, and understands local needs.
- **Efficiency** - all work is supported by a national infrastructure which provides vision, ensures the dissemination of high quality information and best practice, avoids duplication of work and maintains standards.

**The future for UKMi**

UKMi has five strategic aims, which are set out below. In order to achieve these it is important that the structure and integrity of the UKMi network is sustained to enable collaborative working. There must also be sensitivity to different policy developments and priorities across the devolved functions. The network will ensure the continuous development of robust standards of practice and a competent workforce able to deliver the service.

**Strategic Aim 1: Reflect a patient-focused NHS**

The public has become increasingly aware of the complexities and risks of the use of medicines for themselves and their families. In response, the NHS is developing a patient-focused culture in which patients have greater access to good quality health information, including that on medicines. UKMi will develop services that will:

- Improve access to, and the number of, local patient helplines as a source of advice for the community served by NHS secondary care Trusts. The Healthcare Commission has identified a need for such helplines.4
- Provide patients with written and electronic information (eg patient information leaflets, commonly asked questions).
- Increase collaboration with patient-focused organisations such as NHS Direct/NHS24.

**Strategic Aim 2: Develop the service to healthcare providers**

The demand for UKMi services has continued to increase due to developments in medicines management, evidence-based practice, clinical governance and risk management, NHS financial pressures, and as medicines have become more complex.

UKMi will work with local stakeholders to develop the service and improve access, efficiency and quality. While local changes will, of course, reflect local circumstances, UKMi will:

- Increase support for patient safety issues by meeting local and national imperatives (eg producing a national injectable medicines guide in response to NPSA guidelines5).
- Support the developing roles of health care professionals, such as community pharmacists and supplementary/independent prescribers.
- Promote the service and provide equitable access to all healthcare staff providing NHS services.
- Promote and develop the National electronic Library for Medicines (NeLM - www.nelm.nhs.uk) as the means of delivering integrated knowledge and information on medicines to all healthcare staff in the NHS.
- Develop greater use of information technology and electronic media to deliver an efficient and effective service and improve national networking.
- Input to decision-support mechanisms for prescribers (eg within electronic prescribing systems).
- Empower medicines information services to develop as the focus for evidence-based support for medicines management.

**Strategic Aim 3: Develop healthcare staff**

A competent workforce underpins the quality and efficiency of service provision. UKMi will:

- Develop local education and training initiatives to equip healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to reduce risk, and to find and evaluate information. This will improve the appropriate and safe use of medicines.
- Develop an appropriate workforce strategy supported by an accredited specialist training programme. This will underpin competency and career pathways for UKMi staff, including MI technicians, and the establishment of Consultant Pharmacist posts.

**Strategic Aim 4: Support NHS commissioning and planning bodies**

Commissioning is one key element of the introduction of new medicines and related technologies into the NHS, which impacts on the planning requirements of both primary and secondary care. New and developing commissioning/planning arrangements within the NHS, including those at practice level, will be important factors in the future role of UKMi which will:

- Regularly produce and disseminate evidence-based evaluations of new medicines, appraisals of key clinical trials and reviews of groups of medicines to facilitate the work of Medicines Management Committees and formulary staff.
• Support pharmaceutical and prescribing advisors in Primary Care Organisations and Health Boards, and specialist clinical networks.
• Facilitate strategic planning and policy development related to medicines and prescribing in the NHS through horizon scanning and intelligence/scoping of national guidelines and clinical developments.
• Continue to develop a quality assurance framework for the service and its stakeholders that will ensure that it meets standards and offers value for money.
• Provide robust audit processes for other healthcare professionals working with UKMi providing information and advice on medicines eg NHS Direct/ NHS24.
• Support the local implementation of national guidance.

Strategic Aim 5: Collaborate effectively with other organisations at national level

There is continuing development of an infrastructure across the UK to support evidence-based practice, medicines management and clinical governance through a number of national organisations.

UKMi already works in partnership with some of these organisations, and it is expected that this area of work will expand.

In support of these national organisations, UKMi will:
• Continue to develop the horizon-scanning function in association with the National Horizon Scanning Centre (NHSC), the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) and the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group (AWMSG).
• Assist in the effective implementation of guidance from NICE, SMC, SIGN, AWMSG and the Clinical Resource Efficiency Support Team (CREST).
• Promote NeLM as the platform for all quality information on medicines within the NHS.
• Develop further support for NHS Direct (eg New Media, QA programmes, training, call referrals) and NHS24.
• Work with the National Patient Safety Agency on common projects relating to medicines and patient safety.
• Work with the National Knowledge Service in appropriate areas.
• Work with new professional leadership organisations to develop professional leadership roles both across the profession and within UKMi.
• Implement a national research strategy and form links with organisations researching medicines management, informatics and pharmacy practice (eg schools of pharmacy).

Organisations with which UKMi will have a working relationship

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<td>• Health Protection Agency (HPA)</td>
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<td>• Medicines &amp; Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)</td>
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<td>• National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA)</td>
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<td>• Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB)</td>
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<td>• National Horizon Scanning Centre (NHSC)</td>
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<td>• National Institute for Health &amp; Clinical Excellence (NICE)</td>
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<td>• National Prescribing Centre (NPC)</td>
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<td>• NHS Quality Improvement Scotland (NHSQIS)</td>
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<td>• NHS 24</td>
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<td>• Scottish InterCollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN)</td>
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<td>• Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC)</td>
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<td>• All Wales Medicines Strategy Group (AWMSG)</td>
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<td>• NHS Direct Wales</td>
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<td>• Welsh Medicines Resource Centre (WeMeReC)</td>
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<td>• Clinical Resource Efficiency Support Team (CREST)</td>
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How will the development be achieved?

This strategy will be delivered through a combination of changes and developments within UKMi - some of which are already in progress - and through discussions with external stakeholders to identify how the service is best delivered in the changing healthcare environment. Changes will optimise the efficiency of service delivery and the quality of outputs.

These issues will be addressed by a focus on:

1. Collaborative working within UKMi, while being sensitive to different policy developments and priorities across the devolved functions.
2. The IT and communications infrastructure as UKMi will grasp the opportunities presented by the substantial investments being made in this area, in order to make its services more easily accessible to all those involved in the management, prescribing and use of medicines.
3. Appropriate funding for medicines information services to support primary and secondary care at a local level, and at a regional and national level to support wider medicines management initiatives.
4. Investment for services provided to intermediate care, clinical networks, and to independent and charitable sectors.

Conclusion

In developing this strategy, UKMi has worked closely with NHS colleagues from a wide range of professions. This vision of the future for UKMi reflects their wishes, and is founded on the great strengths of the service built up in recent years. Much of this strategy can be achieved by the co-ordinated efforts of UKMi staff themselves; the remainder relies upon support from the NHS - at all levels - to ensure the maximum return from its investment in this service.

It is important, therefore, that all those with an interest in the safe, effective and economical use of medicines now work with UKMi to realise its future - including:

- national-level health policy makers, in all four countries;
- NHS commissioners;
- senior NHS provider managers.

Bibliography

2. The NHS’s Strategic Policy Framework - A supplement to Effective Management for Managing Medicines. Oakley P - Practices made Perfect Ltd. August 2006
For further information contact the Centre listed below that covers your locality. Strategic communications from national or non-NHS bodies should be directed towards any Director of the centres below:

**England**
- Birmingham: 0121 311 1974
- Bristol: 0117 928 2867
- Ipswich: 01473 704431
- Leeds: 0113 245 0530
- Leicester: 0116 255 5779
- Liverpool: 0151 794 8113
- London (Guy’s Hospital): 020 7188 3853
- London (Northwick Park Hospital): 020 8869 3973
- Newcastle: 0191 232 1525
- Southampton: 023 8079 6908

**Wales**
- Cardiff: 029 2074 2796

**Scotland**
- Aberdeen: 01224 552316
- Dundee: 01382 632351
- Edinburgh: 0131 242 2917
- Glasgow: 0141 211 4407

**Northern Ireland**
- Belfast: 028 9063 3847

Information and a full directory of UKMi staff in the UK is also available on the website [www.ukmi.nhs.uk](http://www.ukmi.nhs.uk)