

Drug Tariff Consultation: £19m cuts threaten diabetes patient care

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS:

15% price cut proposal could severely reduce availability of products and services

A consultation was published on 8 May 2006 which proposes a 15% price cut for blood-glucose testing strips, effective as of 1 August 2006. The Commercial Directorate of the Department of Health has ignored the possible implications for patient care and is intent on cutting £19 million from diabetes care. BIVDA, the trade association for In Vitro Diagnostics companies which manufacture, research and develop blood-glucose testing products, has continually argued that any move that restricts the choice and availability of products and services to patients will reduce concordance and lead to less efficient self-monitoring, more long-term complications and longer term costs for the NHS.

Despite these arguments, the consultation proposes substantial price reductions which could have the following implications:

- Some products (blood-glucose testing strips) may no longer be financially viable and could be removed from the market meaning patients would have to change to a different product
- Industry could be forced to withdraw or cut back on the support services currently provided free of charge and the free testing-meters and other hardware
- Some products may have to be paid for by patients rather than the NHS
- Less money may be devoted to research and development for new and innovative products
- New technology available elsewhere in the world may not be introduced into the UK market as it may not be financially viable
- Fewer niche products may be developed and made available for specific groups of diabetes patients such as the elderly, young and blind
- Industry could be forced to cut back on the training currently provided for diabetes specialist professionals

The consultation closes on 6 June 2006 after which changes will be proposed which will come into effect on 1 August 2006.

If you would like more information on how you can help protect services for diabetes patients please call: Doris-Ann Williams, BIVDA, 020 7957 4633.

Reviewing Part IX of the Drug Tariff – the background

In October 2005, the Commercial Directorate of the Department of Health published a consultation proposing different options to replace the reimbursement arrangements for a range of products including blood-glucose testing strips. The consultation aimed to

secure value for money for the NHS, while retaining high quality patient care and ensuring greater transparency in the reimbursement mechanisms. BIVDA responded to the proposed options setting out the benefits of the current system in which the fixed tariff allows the industry to provide additional high-quality services aimed at improving patient concordance.

Currently, services provided free to patients by companies include:

- 24 hour telephone support
- educational literature
- information on the latest developments in diabetes care
- replacement meters and battery systems
- training for diabetes health professionals

It is estimated that these services cost industry approximately £16m per year.

Diabetes self-monitoring and self-management



Blood Glucose meter for patient self-monitoring

Diabetes is a major cause of ill health in England. Approximately 3.5% of the UK adult population (2.1 million people) has been diagnosed as having diabetes and estimates suggest that a further one million people have diabetes but are not aware of it (overall prevalence of 5.2%). The prevalence of diabetes is increasing, particularly among high risk groups which include those who are overweight, have a family history of the condition or are from Asian or Afro-Caribbean origin. Ensuring that high quality diabetes services are available for a growing patient population will have a major impact on health outcomes and on the NHS resources needed to manage the condition.

Diabetes is a condition managed largely by the patient themselves. The Diabetes National Service Frameworks (NSF), published in 2001 and 2003, set out a vision of a system of care where the person with diabetes is at the centre of the decision making process about how their condition is managed. The availability of products to monitor blood-glucose levels and associated services to support patients are therefore crucial for high quality diabetes care which meets the standard of the Diabetes NSFs.

Case Studies

How industry innovation is helping visually impaired people with diabetes

Adrian is a blind man in his sixties living in Bexleyheath, Kent. He has diabetes and as his wife is also blind they found it impossible to self-test using a conventional blood glucose meter which have digital readers. As a consequence Adrian's diabetes was uncontrolled and he was starting to suffer from the long-term effects of the disease. To stop this and to regain good glycaemic control he needed a huge amount of support from the community nurse who was visiting him three times a day to perform his blood glucose monitoring. Once Adrian obtained a speaking blood glucose meter he was able to test himself reliably and this has led to an improvement in his health and helped him to regain both his independence and a feeling of self-worth. He now just needs to attend the routine diabetes clinic every 6 months in the same way as sighted people with diabetes. This product was introduced into the UK early in 2005 by a British company responding to a need in the diabetes patient population. John Godber from the RNIB said: " *We're delighted with this product. An inaccessible blood glucose monitor is like playing Russian roulette with your life.*"

For more information about the products supplied by BIVDA members and the services provided to diabetes patients and patients using anti-coagulation oral therapy please contact: Doris-Ann Williams, Director General, BIVDA.

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