NICE news in the annals

NICE embracing digital technology

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Since the beginning of the existence of NICE in April 1999, there has been almost constant change. We were originally set up to ensure that the most clinically and cost effective drugs and treatments were made widely available on the NHS in England and Wales, and to help clinicians by injecting scientific rigour into the complex and crowded business of clinical guideline production. From a small organisation producing a handful of technology appraisals and clinical guidelines, our remit has expanded to include recommendations for the public health community, guidance on interventional procedures, diagnostics assessments and medical technologies. More recently, we have started to provide information on new medicines and other prescribing advice. April 2013 saw the introduction of a programme to produce guidance and quality standards in social care – as such, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 has re-established NICE as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

Our role, responsibilities and organisational status are not the only things to have changed at NICE. In recent years we have embraced digital technology to present and promote our products, and better reflect the way we know healthcare professionals increasingly want to access this information – quickly and easily.

Digital media

With 14 years' experience of driving quality improvement in the healthcare system, NICE's job is an important one. We strive to present our products in the most appropriate formats, and disseminate them in ways that reflect the needs and behaviours of those who use them, supporting decision making in the NHS and beyond. In the past couple of years, this has been steered significantly by the rise of digital media.

From October 2011 our guidance products went 'digital only' – no more printed material. This was a significant change for NICE because hardcopy dissemination, through direct mail-outs and distribution at conferences and events, had been a major part of our communication activity. Going digital enabled us to concentrate on providing our key audiences with information that is fit for purpose, and delivered efficiently and cost effectively. We have recently begun a major redevelopment of the NICE website, and we are creating user friendly digital products such as mobile applications (apps) for our guidance and reference information (eg the British National Formulary) to achieve this aim.

Website redevelopment

With nearly one million visits every month, our website is the primary resource for those planning, providing and receiving health and social care services. We have upgraded our website's search and browse facilities as part of a project to develop and improve access to our guidance and other products. It is now possible to not only search for guidance but to also search easily within a piece of guidance. We have also introduced a new 'find guidance' tab, which is accessible on every page of the site. This makes it easier to browse for guidance according to type, condition or publication date.

Our website redevelopment project is ongoing: phase 2, scheduled for release in early summer 2013, is exploring how the site's functionality and interactivity can be improved as well as how the website can be integrated more closely with other services provided by NICE, such as NHS Evidence.

Web-formatted guidance

Increasingly, users of our guidance and advice products say that they prefer to access this information on screen. We have responded by providing web-formatted versions so that users no longer need to read through long PDF documents to find what they are looking for. Instead of reading an overview of a clinical condition, for example, users can jump straight to the recommendations. Furthermore, they can copy and paste relevant sections into Microsoft® Word documents, or they can email sections to themselves or others.

Our guidance PDF documents are still available to download for free from our website for those who prefer to print guidance for reference.

NICE pathways

NICE publishes several pieces of guidance and support tools every month, which are aimed at diverse audiences across healthcare, public health and social care. In 2012 alone, we published 91 pieces of guidance, including updates, taking the total to nearly 800 documents since 1999. We know that it is impossible for healthcare professionals in a clinical setting to recall instantly what we have published. For this reason, to facilitate quick access to all guidance relevant to a

particular disease or condition, we have collated pieces of guidance by clinical topic and presented them in an online interactive tool called NICE pathways.

NICE pathways provide quick and easy access, topic by topic, to the range of guidance from NICE. For example, rather than searching and reading through various pieces of interventional procedures guidance, clinical guidelines and technology appraisals all on chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, you can browse one NICE pathway on the condition, which will summarise everything that we have published in easy-to-read flowchart diagrams. Users can also select sections of guidance they need of relevance to their specialism, such as recommendations on surgical interventions. If you would like to find out more and watch a demonstration video, click on the NICE pathways tab on the top panel of our website.

NICE guidance app

The number of UK health professionals using smartphones for work purposes is increasing and NICE has adapted to this growing trend by developing a guidance app that allows users to access our guidance from their smartphone or tablet. The app gives offline access to all of our guidance products and quality standards, organised by clinical or public health topic. It allows users to bookmark individual sections

and move from chapter to chapter. It updates automatically as soon as new guidance has been published on our website, which means that you will always have the latest advice from NICE in your pocket to support your clinical decision making.

More than 100,000 downloads of the app have placed it in the list of leading healthcare apps. If you have an Android™ or Apple® smartphone or tablet you can download the app for free from Google Play or iTunes®. For further information, visit our website or scan the QR code on this page.

Conclusion

NICE plays a crucial role in supporting healthcare professionals in the delivery of high quality, evidence-based care. We are committed to engaging our key audiences in the best ways possible, reflecting their evolving communications habits and preferences.

If there are more effective ways that we could be reaching you, or if you have any feedback about any of our products and how they are presented or disseminated, please get in touch.

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NICE Annual Conference 2013

We will be in Birmingham on 14 and 15 May for our annual conference. This will be an exciting opportunity to find out more about our guidance products and to put your questions to the major partners in the new health and social care architecture. To find out more and to book your ticket, visit:

<http://www.niceconference.org.uk/>