National Collaborating Centres for Maternal and Child Nutrition

The Health Development Agency (HDA)* launched nine Collaborating Centres across England in late 2004, to work on major public health priorities, including tobacco control, obesity, physical exercise, drug addiction and community engagement. Two of these new national Collaborating Centres work on Maternal and Child Nutrition – one for Evidence and Guidance, and the other for Practice Development. The purpose of both Centres is to address inequalities in health by improving maternal and child nutrition. The Centres will work to support evidence-based practice by making up to date information about the evidence base available, and by working with a range of partner organizations to move the evidence into practice.

The Evidence and Guidance Collaborating Centre in Maternal and Child Nutrition is responsible for producing reviews of the evidence base, and guidance based on this evidence that will be of use to practitioners and policy makers.

The Practice Development Collaborating Centre in Maternal and Child Nutrition is responsible for working with practitioners and policy makers across the country to develop and change practice.

These Centres offer a new opportunity to raise the profile of maternal child nutrition, create networks and links across disciplines and sectors, improve the information available to policy makers and practitioners, and to support real practice change. The work programme for both Centres has started, although staffing is not yet fully established. Priorities for the first year of the programme were set by the funding agency; these are:

Evidence and Guidance Collaborating Centre:

1. A systematic review of studies of food support programmes for low-income women in pregnancy.

*In April 2005, responsibility for the Collaborating Centres will transfer from the HDA to the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE); it is anticipated that the work programme will continue as outlined.

This review is examining controlled studies of national programmes such as the US Supplementary Nutrition Programme for Women, Infant and Children (WIC), as well as regional and local programmes which aim to provide nutritional support for low income women. The primary outcome is low birth-weight, but other outcomes such as maternal morbidity are included. It will provide information about ways of effectively providing nutritional support for low-income pregnant women in developed countries, and will provide essential information for policy makers responsible for such programmes.

2. The development of practice guidance to support the initiation and duration of breastfeeding.

This work builds on two completed HDA-funded reviews of breastfeeding (Protheroe *et al.*, 2003; Renfrew *et al.*, 2004 and in press). Specific guidance for practice is being developed following consultation with practitioners and managers across England, and resources will be produced to give information about effective ways of promoting and supporting breastfeeding women in the UK. It is likely that this guidance will be relevant to practitioners in other developed countries.

Practice Development Collaborating Centres:

1. A multidisciplinary learning needs assessment of breastfeeding initiation and duration.

This work is examining the preparedness of different disciplines and sectors to work with and support women who breastfeed, and includes work with midwives, health visitors, medical practitioners, social services staff, nurses, and others. The work includes a national survey, consultation with key organisations, and in-depth work with practitioners and managers.

2. Building on this work, a programme of capacity building will be developed, working with practitioners across England, to be implemented towards the end of 2005. This work might include developing new educational resources, devising media campaigns, and

producing material that can be used by practitioners to plan local services.

Both Centres are based in the Mother and Infant Research Unit in the University of York, and are supported by a consortium of academic, professional and consumer partners across a wide range of sectors, with the intention of being able to draw on expertise and networks across the country as needed. The Evidence and Guidance Collaborating Centre is supported by the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, University of York; the Nutritional Epidemiology Group, University of Leeds; and the Health Services Research Centre, Coventry University. The Practice Development Collaborating Centre is supported by the Health Services Research Centre, Coventry University; Gill Herbert Consultancy and Development; the Yorkshire and Humber Public Health Observatory; and the West Yorkshire Strategic Health Authority. A series of sentinel sites, each involving the whole health economy in one area – hospitals, primary care trusts, social services, local authorities and others – is being established, with which the Centres will work closely to test out approaches. These sites will be based in areas of deprivation, including both rural and urban areas.

Other work to support both Collaborating Centres includes the establishment of an annual series of multidisciplinary, cross-sectoral invitational workshops, as a mechanism for discussing future work priorities and addressing problems.

International partnerships are also being developed.

Centre staff will be pleased to hear from national and international colleagues conducting similar work, or who wish to support or contribute to our work programme.

Both Centres can be contacted at: <http://dohs-mcncc@york.ac.uk>; +44 (0)1904 321829.

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