

NATIONAL SCREENING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Advice to the Director-General of Health

Title	The introduction of new screening technologies in health
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Over the course of its meetings in 2006, the National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC) discussed a number of concerns relating to the introduction of new screening technologies in health. NSAC is concerned at the potential for health practitioners and other providers to introduce new screening technologies and methods of testing without any consideration of potential harms, or external oversight.

It is relatively easy to introduce new equipment and testing methods into New Zealand without external oversight. There are no guidelines or standards that require monitoring of new technologies and testing methods, and insufficient evaluation is carried out to determine whether new technologies and methods of screening produce better health outcomes.

The promotion of new technologies for screening and diagnostic purposes seems to be particularly attractive to the private sector. A recent paper published in France suggests that some practitioners actively promote new screening technologies in the private sector, resulting in increasing numbers of consumers expecting the screening and diagnostic tests as a matter of routine.

In New Zealand, we have the experience of technologies that are initially introduced for diagnostic purposes. However, over time clinical practice changes and the diagnostic technologies may be used for ad-hoc screening (e.g. the use of ultrasound during pregnancy). As a result technologies and methods of screening are used in a way that is different to the purpose for which they were introduced and without consideration of the potential for harm.

NSAC considers there may be a need for a system or processes to assess all new screening technologies and methods of testing before they are introduced into either private or publicly funded services. This would likely require the development of criteria to guide the consideration of new technologies and a high level committee responsible for assessing screening technologies and determining whether their introduction is allowed.

NSAC is aware that the Joint DHB and Ministry collaborative group considering Service Planning and New Health Intervention Assessment (SPNHIA) has a role in relation to the introduction of new technologies in District Health Boards but considers that this process is not broad enough in scope to address the safety and quality concerns held by NSAC.

Recommendations

NSAC makes the following recommendations to you in relation to the introduction of new health technologies.

1. That the Joint DHB and Ministry collaborative group considering Service Planning and New Health Intervention Assessment (SPNHIA), the National Health Committee, and other relevant Advisory Committees be informed of NSAC's concerns regarding the introduction of new screening technologies and screening tests.
2. That SPNHIA and/or other relevant Advisory Committees assess the need for a process to manage the introduction of new screening technologies and screening tests across the health sector.