

NICE exports its health technology expertise

Policy decisions that can have a negative impact on the pharmaceutical sector, such as arbitrary price cuts and delisting, are on the rise. At a global level, this is leading to an increasingly unpredictable environment for drug developers as well as their investors. In an effort to curb this trend, the international team within the UK's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE International) is advising healthcare policy makers in other countries to engage with all stakeholders when determining what 'evidence of value' really means.

On 13 April 2012, NICE International's founding director, Kalipso Chalkidou, spoke to *MedNous* about how her five-person team (see box) assists foreign governments with using evidence to inform health policy and why she believes this will benefit industry and investors in the long run.

A demand-driven programme

NICE is highly regarded around the world for its health technology assessment (HTA) model and evidence-based guidance, which it uses to help resolve uncertainty about which medicines, technologies, treatments and procedures offer the best value for money within the UK's National Health Service. In response to growing requests for advice from other governments, NICE established its international programme in 2008.

"We didn't set out to sell NICE...Setting up NICE International was very much a reactionary response to people being interested in the product approaching us", said Dr Chalkidou. Although NICE International charges a fee for its services, the programme is not-for-profit and the fees are used solely to recoup core costs, ie salaries and expenses. The unit receives funding directly from client countries or from bodies such as the World Bank and the World Health Organization.

The NICE International Advisory Group – currently chaired by Robert Hecht of the US-based Results for Development Institute – develops the programme's strategic direction and identifies opportunities for new work.

To date, over 30 countries have approached NICE International for assistance, according to Dr Chalkidou. It is "very much a demand-driven programme" and therefore the team tailors its services specifically to the needs of each client.

Although the unit works closely with high-income countries such as the US, Denmark and Germany to share knowledge, NICE International's paying projects mostly involve the provision of advice to low and middle-income countries including Argentina, China, Colombia, India, Jordan and Romania. The programme's 'products' fall into three broad categories:

- **Capacity building and training.** This covers process skills, eg how to establish a process for turning evidence into policy, how to identify people to staff committees, what types of technical skills are needed 'in house', how to carry out outsourcing analysis, etc. It also includes support for technical skills such as critical appraisal of evidence and HTA to inform decisions, as well as cost management functions and budget impact assessments.

The NICE International team

Kalipso Chalkidou – Founding Director

Francoise Cluzeau – Senior Adviser

Derek Cutler – Assistant Project Manager

Reetan Patel – Programme Manager

Francis Ruiz – Senior Adviser

- **Technical pilots and demonstration projects.** This addresses specific situations, such as how to manage primary hypertension in a rural setting in Jordan. NICE International works with local experts, policy makers, hospital managers and, when possible, patients to adapt existing guidance (not necessarily produced by NICE) to the local setting.
- **Institution building.** The programme assists governments with the organisational and governance aspects of setting up a NICE-type body, and also helps to establish decision-making mechanisms. For example, it has worked with the governments of Colombia and China on building their own versions of NICE.

Dr Chalkidou noted that while her clients are interested in HTA for informing reimbursement decisions, it is because they want to ensure they are getting value for money as they invest more in healthcare systems. "It's not like in Europe where there's an attempt to try and contain costs because of the [economic] crisis. They're moving towards universal coverage, so they're spending more. HTA is just one way of trying to benchmark how much they're willing or able to spend on a certain service or a certain technology", she said.

Benefit to industry and investors

Through its partnerships with leading policy makers, NICE International aims to create a platform where investors and industry "can come together with payers and have a conversation about resources, about what it is that they can commit. And of course for that, it's the evidence of value", said Dr Chalkidou.

The team's goal is to set out transparent rules "from the demand side for the supply side" that say what governments, payers and insurance funds expect and what they are willing to pay. The key to greater predictability is that policy makers need to develop these rules in collaboration with the commercial sector and follow them consistently.

In the absence of this type of platform, Dr Chalkidou believes the trend towards counterproductive reference pricing, arbitrary price cuts and delisting, and potentially even violation of patents, will continue, "and that's certainly not beneficial for anybody".

This article was written by Karen Finn, contributing editor to *MedNous*.