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EUROSCAN – THE EUROPEAN INFORMATION NETWORK ON NEW AND CHANGING HEALTH TECHNOLOGIES

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Abstract The early identification and prioritisation new and emerging health technologies is now recognised as an integral part of the health technology assessment process. Early warning or horizon scanning systems are part of the regular approval processes in a number of countries. The idea for an international network of early warning systems had been discussed for some years and came to being in 1998 with the first meeting of EuroScan (The European Information Network on New and Changing Health Technologies). EuroScan now has twelve member agencies from Europe, Canada and Israel. Members of EuroScan have collaborated to develop a common understanding of early warning activity, shared information on methods used for early identification and assessment, shared results of early warning activities and developed a web-based database of important new and emerging technologies. This collaboration has proved invaluable, avoiding duplication of effort, increasing reliability of output, and increasing efficiency within systems.

Key words: early warning, horizon scanning, health technology, collaboration, identification, prioritisation.

Introduction

The development and diffusion of new health technologies has gathered pace over recent decades and it is commonly accepted that advances in technology have been one of the most important drivers of increased health care spending. The supply of fragmented information about new and emerging medical innovations and uncertainties regarding effectiveness and cost-effectiveness puts pressure on health planning systems especially where restrictions on healthcare funding are in place. Policy-makers and medical professionals have expressed an interest in information systems that can prioritise innovations early in their life cycle according to their potential for impact, and provide systematic and timely reports about important, emerging health technologies and their anticipated clinical efficacy and impact on health services [1,2]. The early identification and prioritisation of new and emerging health technologies is an essential part of the health technology assessment (HTA) process and is of particular relevance to national and regional health policy-makers.

Early warning or horizon-scanning systems have been part of the regular approval processes in a few European countries for some years. A survey in 1998 among members of the International Network of Agencies for Health Technology Assessment (INAHTA) showed that 30% of agencies had continuing and structured early warning activities. This development of systems for early identification and assessment of innovations in a number of countries offered great potential for a collaborative network.

Methods

The feasibility and benefits of an international network of early warning systems had been discussed for some years. In January 1995, the Danish Hospital Institute organised a meeting entitled "International Collaboration Concerning Monitoring of Emerging Medical Technologies (ICCMEMT)". Fourteen participants attended and discussed national experiences and the possibility for a European collaboration. A number of options for an ICCMEMT-system were discussed. The next major development took place in 1997 with an international workshop "Scanning the Horizon for Emerging Health Technology" in Copenhagen. This was supported by the Danish Institute for Health Technology Assessment, the Swedish Council on Technology Assessment in Health Care and the European Commission DG V as part of the "HTA Europe" project. It attracted twenty-seven policy makers and researchers from twelve countries. The major findings from the Copenhagen workshop concerning collaboration focused on the obvious value of exchanging information and experience [3,4] and further collaboration among organisations working with early warning systems was strongly recommended.

Results and Discussion

Following an agreement in Copenhagen a small working group was established with representatives from Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom with associated representatives from Canada and Switzerland. The European Information Network on New and Changing Health Technologies (EuroScan) developed from this working group and is a collaborative network of health technology assessment agencies for the exchange of information on new drugs, devices, procedures, processes, and settings in health care (www.publichealth.bham.ac.uk/euroscan) . Table 1 provides a list of current members.

EuroScan has regular meetings and has by-laws outlining the groups' mission statement and formal membership structure. The members of EuroScan

Table 1

Current EuroScan Membership

Chair	Dr Jill Saunders	Canadian Coordinating Office for Health Technology Assessment (CCOHTA)
Vice Chair	Dr Iñaki Gutiérrez	Basque Office for Health Technology Assessment (Osteba)
Registrar	Dr Inger Norderhaug	Norwegian Centre for Health Technology Assessment (SMM)
Treasurer	Ms Anne-Florence Fay	Committee for Evaluation and Diffusion of Innovative Technologies, Assistance Hôpitaux Publique de Paris (CEDIT)
Head of Secretariat	Dr Claire Packer	National Horizon Scanning Centre, England (NHSC)
Members	Mr Torben Jorgensen	Danish Centre for Evaluation and Health Technology Assessment (DACEHTA)
	Dr Setafilla Luengo	Agencia de Evaluacion de Tecnologias Sanitarias (AETS), Madrid
	Dr Gabriël ten Velden	Health Council of the Netherlands (GR)
	Professor Andrew Stevens	National Horizon Scanning Centre (NHSC), England
	Dr Julian Schilling	Federal Social Insurance Office of Switzerland (FSIOS)
	Dr Per Carlsson	Swedish Council on Technology Assessment in Health Care (SBU)
	Dr Román Villegas	Agencia de Evaluacion de Tecnologias Sanitarias de Andalucia (AETSA), Seville
	Dr Orna Tal	Division of Medical Technology Policy, Ministry of Health, Israel (DMTP)
Researcher/ Administrator	Dr Sue Simpson	National Horizon Scanning Centre (NHSC), England

aim to share and evaluate key information on selected emerging health technologies or new applications of existing ones in order to address their effects and the anticipated short and long term consequences of their use for health care and society. EuroScan also aims to support national agencies and HTA organisations in developing and running systems to provide information to health planners and policy makers on important new and changing health technologies. In addition a research programme is being developed to investigate questions of mutual interest. Members of EuroScan have collaborated to develop a common understanding of early warning activity, shared information on methods used for early identification and assessment, shared results of early warning activities and developed a web-based database of important new and emerging technologies, with over four hundred entries to date.

Collaboration in early warning activities is important. The corroboration of findings from individual member agencies avoids duplication of effort, increases reliability of output, increases efficiency within systems and assists agencies with limited resources. However, the benefits of collaboration are gained without losing local sensitivity or compromising timeliness as agencies continue to control their own outputs and means of dissemination of findings.

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