

26 November 2009

Gateway Reference: 13052

Dear Colleague

Safe Management and Use of Controlled Drugs

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is responsible for making sure that healthcare providers, and regulators are creating a safer environment for the management of controlled drugs.

In support of this, they publish an annual report, the second of which was published in August 2009¹ and is available for download from their website at www.cqc.org.uk. In this they describe how the new arrangements introduced in the Health Act 2006 “have matured and been consolidated”, and make recommendations to safeguard the safety of people who use services.

One of the key aspects of the new arrangements introduced by the Health Act 2006 was the establishment of the role of Accountable Officers (AOs) to ensure the safe management and use of controlled drugs in healthcare organisations², both NHS and private, and particularly for PCT AOs with their additional responsibility to establish and operate Local Intelligent Networks³.

I am writing to remind you of the responsibility you as Chief Executives, and your organisations, have in regulations⁴ to support your AOs in the delivery of their role.

In particular, the CQC Annual Report makes three recommendations that I would like you to consider how most effectively you can support your AOs and your organisations to deliver

- Healthcare organisations should ensure they have AOs in place at all times. They should have mechanisms to replace AOs immediately when they leave and notify CQC of the change;
- PCT AOs should collaborate more effectively with other PCTs and national bodies, to ensure that suitable numbers of authorised witnesses are available for destroying obsolete drugs. There would be a robust mechanism for recognising authorised witnesses, and healthcare professionals need to be made aware of the purpose of having authorised witnesses;

¹ The safer management of controlled drugs. Annual report 2008. Care Quality Commission. CQC-033-1500-CWP-082009

² The Controlled Drugs (Supervision of Management and Use) Regulations 2006. Regulation 9

³ The Controlled Drugs (Supervision of Management and Use) Regulations 2006. Regulation 18

⁴ The Controlled Drugs (Supervision of Management and Use) Regulations 2006. Regulation 7

- Local intelligence networks must make sure that all their designated bodies are kept up to date with the formation and leadership of the network, and that they know where to submit their reports. Networks should be reminded to keep their membership and working arrangements under review, and to keep everyone informed.

To reinforce the importance of your support I would like to reference Cynthia Bower, CQC's chief executive, comments on the progress that has been made in the delivery of the framework to support the safe management and use of controlled drugs "The important thing about these new systems is that they keep everyone talking to each other. Healthcare staff are better trained and more aware of issues relating to controlled drugs. We also have access to more information about prescribing patterns. Organisations should keep building on this good work and continue to reduce risks to patients as much as they possibly can."

To support this, the Department has worked with the National Prescribing Centre to develop and launch a web based resource to support all AOs – http://www.npci.org.uk/cd/public/home_page.php. This provides access to a variety of tools for AOs, such as links to relevant legislation, guidance, training and frequently asked questions as well as an AO only discussion forum.

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind you that David Colin-Thome's letter of 2 October (DH Gateway Reference 12667) on Out of Hours Primary Care Services⁵ although not focused on controlled drugs also has implications about they are contractually controlled through your out of hours commissioning arrangements. His letter details a number of references to where more relevant detailed information is available.

If you have, any questions relevant to the safe management and use of controlled drugs please contact my colleague Chris Harris (chris.harris@dh.gsi.gov.uk) and he will be happy to assist.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. W. Ridge', with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

Keith Ridge
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer (England)

⁵ http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/DH_106349