Health technology assessments

When you take a medicine or treatment to alleviate symptoms you have, or when you are given medication to prevent a future event, you are at the end of process which has often taken many years to achieve.

From discovery, basic research, testing and, eventually, approval to use a treatment, are processes that all have various protocols, rules and legislation to make sure that the product works and is safe.

A process which has to be completed is the health technology assessment (HTA) research. HTA research is undertaken when evidence exists to show that a technology can be effective. The purpose of an HTA study is to establish the clinical and cost-effectiveness for the NHS in comparison with the current best alternative(s). In the UK this is undertaken by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC), the All-Wales Medicines Strategy Group (AWMSG) and in Northern Ireland, the Department of Health (DoH). Prior to the HTA process, drugs and devices need to be licensed, which falls under the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's (MHRA) responsibilities.

Beyond the UK there are similar health technology assessment and drugs agencies that provide advice to their health providers and reimbursement agencies. Most notably, in the United States the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is responsible for protecting the public health by ensuring the safety, efficacy and security of human and veterinary drugs, biological products and medical devices, and by ensuring the safety of the country's food supply, cosmetics, and products that emit radiation. For Europe, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) provides evaluations of marketing-authorisation applications submitted through the centralised procedure to provide the basis for the authorisation of medicines in Europe.

To bring many of these agencies and groups together, Health Technology Assessment international (HTAi) is the global, non-profit, scientific and professional society for all those who produce, use or encounter health technology assessments. It represent 82 organisations and more than 2,500 individual members from 65 countries around the world.

HTAi is a member-driven organisation, representing a variety of stakeholders who have interests in HTA. These stakeholders include researchers, policy makers, industry, academia, health service providers, agencies and patients, and they contribute to balanced conversation around HTA across different areas of practice and jurisdictions.

The main event in the HTAi calendar is the annual

meeting. In 2021, the meeting was held in June. Originally set to be hosted in Manchester as a face-to-face meeting, following the global pandemic, the meeting was held as a virtual event.

The main theme of adaptive approaches to HTA was supplemented by three plenary themes:

- Evidence for HTA: Innovative Methods for Challenging Times
- Patients at the Heart of Innovation
- Innovating HTA to support Novel Interventions.

The 2021 annual meeting focused on how HTA can continue to provide the cornerstone in leading health systems innovation, particularly as technologies advance and novel interventions rapidly emerge. As our technological world evolves and new challenges appear, HTA will need to adapt to ensure it continues to be a conduit to support technology innovation.

Innovation in the approach, pace, and scale of health technology development is rapid. As decision-makers respond to the pressures of not only meeting the essential needs of local health systems but also providing progressive and world-class care, traditional approaches to HTA are being challenged.

Collaboration - in developing HTA in emerging regions and developing novel approaches to HTA in systems with established HTA - is essential to the goal of supporting patient access to evidence-based healthcare, particularly as diagnostic and treatment pathways become ever more complex. Through the three aforementioned sub-themes, the meeting explored opportunities presented across global health systems for sustained use of HTA.

It provided an opportunity for researchers, policymakers, healthcare practitioners, technology developers and patients to reflect on how they might innovate at regional and local level across the core HTA elements of evidence, methods, and decision-making.

Background for the meeting

The role of patients was particularly highlighted in the second plenary session. This followed a call for action from a 2019 HTAi workshop for HTA agencies and all stakeholders, including patients, to work together with shared purpose, to change the culture in HTA bodies, with greater patient involvement and alignment with HTA agency goals to improve health outcomes.

In the session Patients at the Heart of Innovation, which had speakers from a variety of specialities, there was agreement that patients need to be part of the assessment process at all stages as they provide vital input to the 'lived experience' of having a condition and how that qualitative insight can provide useful knowledge that perhaps isn't always obvious through quantitative clinical research.

It was also clear that shared understanding across settings with emerging patient engagement practices may highlight opportunities for ensuring meaningful engagement.

The 2022 HTAi annual meeting will be held in Utrecht, Netherlands on June 25-29. The meeting will offer a hybrid event with on-site and virtual access. The main theme will be ***Lifecycle Approach: Coming Together to Make it Happen.***

For more information, visit the HTAi website: https://htai.org