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COPD DIAGNOSTIC DEVICES COULD SAVE NHS OVER £8.5 MILLION



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COPD is one of the nation's most prolific diseases. Encompassing conditions like chronic bronchitis and emphysema, this debilitating condition affects approximately 1.4 per cent of the UK population and is the country's fifth biggest killer¹. While many COPD sufferers are kept under close surveillance by the healthcare practitioners around them, many unfortunately still remain at high risk of emergency admission to hospital – which can be costly to Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) from both a financial and a patient care perspective.

With the number of COPD case loads expected to rise over the coming years², improving the level of care for sufferers, avoiding related emergency admissions and keeping costs under control, are all high priorities for PCTs throughout England.

At the end of this year, the Department for Health will unveil its National Services Framework (NSF) for COPD – an initiative designed to improve the quality of COPD services the length and breadth of the country. The External Reference Group (ERG) working on this project has already acknowledged the vital role innovative technologies will play in delivering improved quality of care and patient monitoring for COPD sufferers; giving a strong indication that these will be a driving force for change when the implementation stage of the framework kicks in during 2009.

So in the run up to the framework launch,

what can PCTs do to get a head start, champion improvements on their own doorstep, enhance COPD patient care levels in their area and crucially, manage their financial fate? Well, one obvious way is to extend the availability of diagnostic procedures and devices which enable the monitoring and management of COPD patients within the community, and where possible, in the comfort of their own homes.

This approach, which is already being undertaken by some forward thinking PCTs in England, can be hugely beneficial from a patient perspective. And now, new figures calculated by Axis-Shield UK also reveal that making strategically sound investment decisions when it comes to choosing diagnostic devices, could also have a positive impact on the overall balance sheet of the NHS - to the tune of a dramatic £8.5 million.

Every time a COPD patient is admitted unexpectedly to hospital, the associated financial impact is £2,337³. Using this national tariff as the basis for its numbers, Axis-Shield UK has worked out that if each of the 152 healthcare trusts in England were to prevent just two COPD-related emergency admissions a month, the overall cost saving would be a staggering £8,525,376⁴.

Commenting, Sue Youngusband, marketing director for Axis-Shield UK said: "While the overall cost saving number we

have calculated is incredibly compelling, and eight million pounds is obviously a significant amount of money, it's important to remember that for the vast majority of PCTs, reducing emergency admissions is not just about improving the bottom line. It's also about providing better patient care, reducing anxiety for people with chronic conditions and making the lives of sufferers, and those around them, much more manageable. The great thing about some of the monitoring devices available today – like our product i-STAT® – is that they can do all of these things, while also saving vast amounts of money."

For those doctors, nurses and matrons directly involved in treating COPD sufferers in the community, the availability of portable diagnostic devices like i-STAT® mean a patient's status can be monitored without sending them into hospital for sometimes lengthy tests. While this obviously helps keep costs down, from a practical medical point of view, it also means lab-accurate results can be obtained in minutes, rather than hours or days. Put another way, this means staff can calculate and administer the required medication needed to quickly stabilise a patient without delay.

Continuing, Sue Youngusband, said: "Our work with a number of respiratory clinics, operating at a primary care level, shows the value that can be derived from deploying portable handheld solutions like i

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-STAT® is vast. Measuring a range of parameters including blood gases and providing reliable, lab accurate test results in minutes, i-STAT® enables respiratory nurses to monitor the status of COPD patients while they are with them. This means informed decisions on accurate dosing, alterations to medication or the need for a patient to undergo further assessment can be made at the point of care. The benefits of this are twofold; less anxiety and inconvenience for patients, who can find out test results on the spot, plus reduced costs for PCTs if emergency admissions are prevented."

More than 30 PCTs are now using i-STAT® from Axis-Shield UK, which has the capacity to store up to 5,000 patient records. The device works by using advanced biosensor technology and as little as two drops of blood plus a test cartridge. Two such organisations are Leatherhead Community Assessment Unit in Surrey and NHS Norfolk.

Commenting, Sue Johnson, an Oxygen Nurse for NHS Norfolk said: "The portability of i-STAT® means we can test patients at home and avoid a trip to hospital, which can be very difficult for people in rural areas."

Concurring, Julie Ricketts, Lead Nurse at Leatherhead Community Assessment Unit said: "If it wasn't for i-STAT® we couldn't run this unit. It allows us to keep patients out of hospital and manage them better in the community." ■

For more information about Axis-Shield UK go to: www.axis-shielduk.com, alternatively feel free to contact: Sue Younghusband

REFERENCES

1 <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/QOF/2006-07/National%20QOF%20tables%202006-07%20-%20prevalence.xls>

- 2 Reference for case load increasing: lung disease rates "on the rise" = <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/6970190.stm>
- 3 Reference for National Tariff: COPD emergency admission = £2,337 http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_081096
- 4 Figure calculated as follows:
- 24 emergency admissions at a cost of £2,337 = £56,088
 - £56,088 for each of the 152 PCTs in the UK = £8,525,376

NB: The cost of performing a blood gas analysis using i-STAT® is around £4.50. Using these numbers and considering the initial purchase of an i-STAT® instrument, a typical PCT could expect to recoup the cost of buying the technology in less than six months, depending on the number of hospital admissions that were avoided.