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To: Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 23 July 2010

Subject: Item 5: Diagnostics – Waiting Times.

1. Introduction.

- (a) A *diagnostic test or procedure* is one which is used to identify a person's disease or condition and so allows a medical diagnosis to be made.
- (b) This is in contrast to a *therapeutic procedure* which involves actual treatment of a person's disease, condition or injury.
- (c) The settings where diagnostic tests are carried out vary on the test, staff, and equipment required.
- (d) In recent years waiting times for diagnostic tests have been recorded by the Department of Health as part of the target for a maximum of an 18-week referral to treatment waiting time. In the December 2009 NHS Operating Framework, one of the supporting measures for the 18-week target is the number of patients waiting less than 6 weeks for a diagnostic test.
- (e) A revision to the NHS Operating Framework was published on 21 June 2010. The following is an extract from the section on 18-week waiting times¹:

“NHS organisations have made significant improvements in access to elective care. Average waiting times now need to be reduced, in line with international experience. Accountability to patients and greater information transparency, through patient choice and the move towards GP-led commissioning, should now make long waits unacceptable. Performance management of the 18 weeks waiting times target by the Department of Health will cease with immediate effect.

“To maintain progress during 2010/11:

- commissioners should maintain the contractual position and GPs and commissioners will want to ensure that any flexibility to improve access reflects local clinical priorities; and
- referral to treatment data will continue to be published and monitored. Commissioners will want to use the median wait as an additional measure for performance managing providers.”

¹ Department of Health, 21 June 2010, *Revision to the Operating Framework for the NHS in England 2010/11*, p.7,
http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/@ps/documents/digitalasset/dh_116860.pdf

2. Definitions of diagnostic tests

(a) The following are the diagnostic tests for which data has been collected along with a brief description:

(b) Part 1 - Imaging

1. Computed Tomography (CT, sometime referred to as a CAT scan).

- a. This uses x-ray techniques and allows a radiologist to take a series of pictures across the body and view images in two or three dimensional form. It can show organs such as the liver, spleen, kidneys and pancreas in great clarity.

2. Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI).

- a. Similar to a CT scan, this uses magnetism and radio waves in order to build up a series of cross-sectional images of tissue.
- b. MR angiography (MRA) uses MRI technology to assist with the diagnosis and treatment of heart disorders, stroke and blood vessel diseases.

3. Non-obstetric ultrasound.

- a. This uses high frequency sound waves for examining soft tissue and fluid filled organs such as the bladder and gall bladder.

4. Barium Enema.

- a. This procedure uses x-rays to examine the large bowel and is preceded 48 hours before the test by a special diet and laxative preparation.

5. DEXA Scan (Dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry).

- a. This uses low doses of x-rays to determine bone density.

(c) Part 2 – Physiological Measurement

1. Audiology – Audiology Assessments.

- a. This term covers a wide range on hearing and balance assessments including referral for hearing aid assessment, tinnitus assessment and paediatric hearing services following newborn screening.

2. Cardiology – echocardiography.

- a. High frequency sound waves are used to produce images of the heart and are used in the diagnosis of heart failure, blood clots and other conditions. The two most common methods of carrying out the procedure are:
 - i. transthoracic echocardiogram (TTE) where the probe is placed on the external chest wall; and,
 - ii. transoesophageal echocardiogram (TOE) where a probe is passed into the oesophagus mounted on a flexible tube.

3. Cardiology – electrophysiology studies (EPS).

- a. This is an invasive procedure carried out in a cardiac catheterisation lab. Catheters with multiple electrodes are placed at specific sites within the heart and provides a detailed analysis of the heart's electrical conduction system.

4. Neurophysiology - peripheral neurophysiology.

- a. Two tests are covered by this term – Nerve Conduction Studies (NCS) which uses surface electrical stimulation to measure the function of nerves and muscles; and,
- b. Electromyography (EMG) which measures the electrical activity of the muscle through a concentric needle electrode being inserted in the muscle and is used in conjunction with NCS and other clinical examinations to investigate causes of muscular weakness, spinal problems, Motor Neurone disease and other disorders.

5. Respiratory physiology - sleep studies.

- a. This covers a range of techniques and technologies to diagnose a variety of sleep-breathing problems such as obstructive sleep apnoea.

6. Urodynamics - pressures & flows.

- a. This is an umbrella term covering measurements of the ability of the bladder and urethra to fulfil their functions.

(d) Part 3 – Endoscopy.

1. An endoscope is a flexible cylindrical instrument equipped with fibre optics and used for a direct visual examination of any part of the interior of the body.
2. Colonoscopy.

- a. This is an examination of the lining of the colon (large bowel) and is sometimes used to confirm the results of procedures like a barium enema.

3. Flexi sigmoidoscopy.

- a. This is an examination of the lining of the rectum and lower colon and is sometimes used to confirm the results of procedures like a barium enema.

4. Cystoscopy.

- a. This is an examination of the bladder and urethra to aid the diagnosis

5. Gastroscopy (Upper Gastro Intestinal endoscopy).

- a. This is an examination of the upper part of the gastrointestinal tract and may follow other tests such as x-rays.