



*Dr Keith Ridge
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To: PCT Chief Executives

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Dear Colleague

The publication of the National Prescribing Centre's Reports into the safe management and use of controlled drugs in Prison and Offender Health settings, for Ambulance and Paramedic settings and for Private Prescribing.

I am pleased to advise you that the National Prescribing Centre (NPC) has this week published, on their Controlled Drugs Accountable Officer website, three reports commissioned by the Department of Health concerning the safe management and use of controlled drugs in the ambulance and paramedic sector, in prisons and when privately prescribed. I would like to bring your attention to these reports and their recommendations and to ask that your Controlled Drugs Accountable Officer (CD AO) shares these reports with colleagues in the NHS and others who have a close interest in these matters. CD AOs will want to consider with their colleagues what further action is needed to bolster arrangements for the safe management and use of controlled drugs locally.

The NPC, supported by an external consultancy, Parkwood Associates, began work on these reports in 2010. The reports therefore capture and reflect the concerns amongst professionals that were relevant at that time. The methodology used for each of the three projects followed broadly similar lines, with a series of focus groups and detailed interviews with experts in the respective fields. The focus groups were drawn from key individual healthcare, professional and representative bodies. Where areas of common concern have been identified, the reports provide guidance and, where appropriate, make recommendations designed to strengthen current operational practice.

The Report on Prison and Offender Health settings has identified a number of matters arising from often complex commissioning and contractual arrangements. The report recommends that prison services have regard to seeking professional expert advice as set out by the Care Quality Commission's "Provider Compliance Assessment - Outcome 16 (Regulation 10)" in assessing and monitoring the quality of service provision. A copy of Outcome 16 can be found on the CQC's website at:

http://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/PCA_OUTCOME_16_new.doc).

In addition to Outcome 16, commissioners may wish to note the findings from a joint report in 2008/09 by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons and the Care Quality Commission in relation to commissioning health and social care for offenders in which the report raises importance of pharmaceutical expertise to ensure robust CD governance within prison settings. A copy of the report can be found on the CQC's website at:

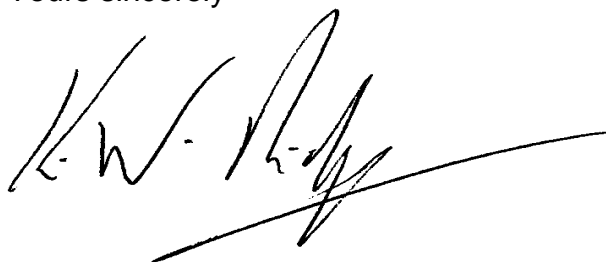
<http://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/commissioninghealthcareinprisons2008-09.pdf>).

The Ambulance and Paramedic Report has identified some key problems concerning the interpretation of current controlled drugs legislation on the possession of controlled drugs. The report makes a number of specific recommendations to ensure workable solutions are available to address these problems. It also recommends that Ambulance Trust CD AOs ensure they have in place good governance and robust management arrangements for controlled drugs for their organisation. In this respect, it is important that Trust AOs have adequate routine access to senior pharmaceutical expertise, advice and leadership.

The Private Prescribing of Controlled Drugs Report provides an insight into the current governance and operational arrangements for the private supply of controlled drugs by practitioners in a range of healthcare settings, through the established prescription and requisition mechanisms. The report identifies a number of areas of weakness within the prescription and requisitioning process. The recommendations made will help develop suitable monitoring and tracking processes for private prescriptions for controlled drugs. Professional and regulatory bodies will also be considering the recommendations aimed at developing systems to help monitor private prescriptions.

I appreciate that many NHS organisations are going through a transitional period which is creating exceptional demands but I would ask you maintain the safe management and use of controlled drugs as a high priority for your organisation so that the good gains already made to patient safety are not lost during the coming months. Whilst we are considering how best to assure the functions of CD AOs integrate with the emerging health and social care system, it also remains very important that CD AOs are adequately resourced to enable them to carry out their full legal obligations.

Yours sincerely

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

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