

HFE Statement on Health Technology Assessment

Background information

Health Technology Assessment (HTA) history and its structure is a relatively recent development and it has been the result of the need for governments to methodically assess the value of innovation in pharmaceutical products, new treatments and medical technology. HTA is conducted by interdisciplinary groups using explicit analytical frameworks drawing from a variety of methods¹". It therefore is a critical checkpoint in determining future access, coverage and the reimbursement to cover the treatment of patients...

With this background, Health First Europe wishes to contribute to the ongoing debate around HTA and the EU involvement in this process.

HTA development:

For the last three decades, European countries have developed structures to help officials to improve decision-making regarding important investment choices. In the health technology sector, one such structure is Health Technology Assessment (HTA). However, the HTA processes differ enormously from one country to another .

HTA in Europe

At EU level there has been a growing interest on HTA. Initially it started as some small projects that looked into supporting collaboration on HTA methods (ex: 1994-2002 EUR-ASSESS). It has now become a permanent structure to enhance EU-wide cooperation, and to assist the Members States to plan, deliver and monitor health services effectively, based on the best available scientific evidence on the medical, social and economic implications of health technology. The current programme is called the Joint Action on HTA 2010-2012 (EUnetHTA JA)².

The objective of the new EUnetHTA Joint Action is to: i) Construct a detailed business model for collaboration addressing the sustainability of the HTA collaboration in Europe, ;ii) Methodological developments to heighten the efficiency and transparency of HTA processes in Europe and iii) applying those tools in European trans-national collaboration and at the national, regional and /or local level. The new Joint Action also includes review of pharmaceuticals and this extends relationships to the EMA, the Working Group on Medical Devices and Directorate-General RTD of the European Commission.

¹ www.inahta.org

² http://www.eunetha.net/Public/About_EUnetHTA/

HFE's position

HFE defends the added value in harmonizing certain elements of the HTA's methodologies as a mean to facilitate decision-making based on evidence/information and will help to make better use of scarce resources and ensure that decisions have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of patients/health professionals are made as quickly and effectively as possible.

However, HFE acknowledges that there are still some open questions regarding the possibility of creating a European HTA process and the distinction between those elements that can be viewed on a pan-European basis, to maximize the value of scarce expertise and knowledge and avoid wasteful duplicative efforts, versus those that will always be national.

1. The mission

HFE recognizes that, with appropriate process, there is value in using HTA as an important analysis tool for providing authorities the means to assess the various aspects of innovations and safety in medical technologies.

2. The methodology

Ideally, HTA can help improving the scientific basis health decision-makers base their policies upon. However, any demand for data to support decision-making process that is unrealistic or practically unattainable can become, in itself, a barrier for the evaluation of innovative treatments.

HFE is also concerned about the underlying models of evaluation and whether they adequately take into account the broader benefits of more effective treatment. For instance, do HTA methodologies take into account the economic and societal benefits of a return to productive life as opposed to the narrower determinants of value such as bed availability in hospital? Does it take into account reduced repeat visits for follow up therapy when a patient can be remotely monitored or is able to self-medicate or self-monitor due to advances in new treatments or new technologies?

3. Role of HTA

HFE is concerned about the fine line between evaluation (HTA) and judgement for reimbursement (Public commissioning bodies). There will be a natural reaction from purchasing departments to use HTA as a means of rationalising healthcare. HFE is very concerned that the methodologies for determining the evaluation could be skewed to make key access decisions for innovative treatments, new medical technology or pharmaceutical products, not on the grounds of its effectiveness, but its cost.

4. Stakeholders involvement

Patients, healthcare professionals, academia, industry, and public should be involved at all stages of the HTA assessment. All have unique and relevant perspectives on the value and practical impact of technology. However, it is vitally important that there are clear and transparent formal processes for the provision of such views and opinions to ensure that all get a fair hearing.

5. Transparency

Collaboration is ineffective without transparency. HFE supports a wide variety of transparency mechanisms in the HTA process and structure including:

- Clear rules of procedures
- Transparency in terms of information available in the assessment process, and transparent processes that enables real dialogue with all relevant stakeholders
- Accountability of all participants
- Decision-making rationale and methodology of decision-making
- Tools used for HTA and their correlation amongst other tools that form the decision-making pool system
- Sources of information
- Any financial, employment or other material connection between HTA authorities and the firms whose products are being evaluated

Conclusion

HTA will continue evolving and the way Governments decide to take it forward will impact on the way healthcare is delivered and obviously patients' choice of new technologies.

With population ageing increasing, long term care will challenge government budgets. The aim of healthcare services should be to offer the best treatment possible and while keeping the highest standards of safety and quality in its services. Being aware of the scarce resources, HTA can help decision makers to make the evidence based decision available but this will only occur if the process and decision making is based on clear evidence and thorough analysis considering all relevant dimensions.

Patients are at the receiving end of HTA evaluations. A simple rejection of a product may delay or prevent patient recovery and any return to normal productive life. HFE therefore supports the efforts of EU policy makers to help achieve a practical, consistent and effective approach to HTA that will benefit patients across the European Union.

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September 2010