

## **Clostridium difficile**

**5 June 2008**

### **Edwina Hart, Minister for Health and Social Services**

Several Assembly Members have recently expressed concern about *Clostridium difficile* (*C.difficile*) in NHS Wales. This has been prompted by the Week in Week Out programme and the news that three patients' deaths were directly attributed to *C.difficile* during an outbreak at Prince Charles Hospital, Merthyr during April.

I can assure you that I take this issue very seriously and that the Welsh Assembly Government is committed to tackling *C.difficile* as a core element of our wider strategy against all Healthcare Associated Infections. We have a range of initiatives in place or currently in development which will assist us in that fight. A summary of these is attached in the annex to this statement. Please note that we have always collected laboratory data on the under 65 year old group but this is quite different to our over 65 year old mandatory surveillance system. We will be extending this surveillance system and its reporting to the over 2 year olds in future.

Members will recall that in October last year, I established a Task and Finish Group to consider re-empowering ward sisters within the NHS in Wales and to develop a plan to ensure that they have the authority, knowledge and skills to improve the hospital environment and standards of care. The report which contains 35 recommendations on aspects such as cleaning of the ward environment and accountability and responsibility for cleaning, will be formally launched on 26 June. In addition, I will be responding formally to the National Assembly Audit Committee's report on HCAs on 19 June.

In respect of Prince Charles Hospital, senior officials in the Chief Medical Officer's Department are satisfied that the Trust responded quickly to manage the outbreak. I now need to be confident that the Trust has put in place measures to reduce the risk of infection even further and that when infections occur, that measures are put in place to reduce the spread. To this end, I have asked Health Inspectorate Wales (HIW) to carry out an immediate independent review of the concerns raised about the number of cases of *C.difficile* at Prince Charles Hospital, Merthyr.

The public is naturally concerned about healthcare associated infections but I would reassure them that we have the policies and guidance in place based on the best evidence. I have asked HIW, over the next few months, to carry out a programme of focussed reviews on how well each Trust in Wales is dealing with *C.difficile*. It will also continue with spot unannounced checks and investigate further any instances where causes for concern are identified. HIW will be supported in this work by staff from the National Public Health Service and the Department of Public Health and Health Professions.



## **MEASURES IN PLACE OR IN DEVELOPMENT TO HELP COMBAT HCAIs (including *C.difficile*)**

- **Surveillance** – the Welsh Healthcare Associated Sub-group recently approved an extension to the *C.difficile* surveillance scheme to include all patients over the age of 2 years old and under the age of 65. The Welsh Healthcare Associated Infection Programme Team (WHAIP) and my officials are actively exploring options in respect of standardising data collection on *C.difficile* in the four UK countries to allow comparability of data. The NPHS are to undertake an exercise to identify the impact that different types of *C.difficile* are having on the spread of infection. Notably, it will identify the impact of the most virulent type, 027 hyper toxin producing *C.difficile*, which can spread more rapidly and cause more severe disease.
- **Antimicrobial stewardship** - Prudent antimicrobial prescribing is crucial in the fight against HCAIs, but particularly in the fight against *C.difficile*. A key strand of the Saving 1000 Lives Campaign is to reduce HCAIs, with antimicrobial stewardship being one of the seven key components of care. Some trusts in Wales do employ antimicrobial pharmacists and have already reaped the benefits by way of decreases in antibiotic usage. WAG will shortly be recommending to trusts that they each employ dedicated antimicrobial pharmacy staff.

In addition, the Chief Medical Officer recently established an Antimicrobial Usage Group under the chairmanship of Prof Chris Butler of Cardiff University, which will consider issues around antimicrobial prescribing and report to, and advise the CMO.

- **Patient information** – a WAG patient information leaflet on *C.difficile* is in the early stages of development and will be issued in the autumn. A number of Trusts have these developed at a local level.
- **Guidance** – a guidance document “*C.difficile* infection – how to deal with the problem: A Board to Ward approach”, jointly produced by the Health Protection Agency and the Department of Health will be disseminated in Wales this summer.
- **Infection reduction targets** – four Trusts have registered *C.difficile* in their infection reduction targets for 2008-9 and these will be monitored closely by officials and the WHAIP team in the coming months.