

The Donaldson Report – Consultation Response

Specific Recommendations:

Recommendation 5: *“We recommend that the regulatory function is more fully developed on the healthcare side of services in Northern Ireland [...]”*

High quality fit for purpose regulation is central to the provision of an effective healthcare service. The role of the regulator should be designed to maximise public confidence in service provision along with promoting open and positive engagement with service providers leading to an overall improvement in the quality of service provision across both acute and non-acute sectors.

Recommendation 7: *“We recommend the establishment of a Northern Ireland Institute for Patient Safety [...]”*

IPEM strongly endorses this proposal. Members employed in a range of scientific and engineering disciplines in Northern Ireland exercise significant responsibility for patient safety, and possess a unique knowledge and expertise base within the health and social care system on matters of design, technology, legislation and best practice. An Institute for Patient Safety should be a forum in which healthcare scientists are given scope to best employ this expertise through problem solving, involvement in design/procurement, training of staff etc.

Recommendation 9: *“We recommend that a small Technology Hub is established to identify the best technological innovations that are enhancing the quality and safety of care around the world and to make proposals for adoption in Northern Ireland. [...]”*

IPEM strongly endorses this proposal. Health & Social Care organisations and specialisms (e.g. healthcare science specialisms) within Northern Ireland, along with local universities, are ideally suited to provide an effective environment for the development of a “Technology Hub” designed to identify and maximise the potential of existing and new technologies within healthcare service provision. Healthcare scientists and engineers possess a unique (and currently often underutilised) knowledge and expertise base to inform procurement of

specific equipment, optimisation of services and equipment and effective management of technology. Integration of their skills at this early stage is imperative to ensure the desired enhancement of quality of care and patient safety, minimisation of clinical risk, and improved cost effectiveness.

General Comments

A modern healthcare service is delivered by healthcare professionals from a wide spectrum of backgrounds and relies heavily upon the use and exploitation of rapidly changing technological developments. IPEM members employed in healthcare science and engineering Northern Ireland are at the forefront of the adoption, optimization and management of such technologies across the region.

Across a range of disciplines (e.g. radiotherapy, nuclear medicine, radiopharmacy, radiological sciences & imaging, clinical engineering & physiological sciences, radiation protection), our members routinely work within a rigorous and evolving framework of quality and safety established by legislation and national guidance standards. NI IPEM members are also closely involved with UK-wide proposals (e.g. 'improving Clinical Engineering and Physical Sciences Services' (iCEPSS)) whose goals to improve safety and standardisation align with those championed in this report. Individual members have expressed dissatisfaction that some practices, such as quality control of equipment and processes (which has a direct impact on patient safety), are seen as less important than day-to-day running of a department, and that staff are expected to acquiesce to departmental pressures and conduct such work outside normal hours. The report's proposals to elevate standardisation and to give primacy to quality and safety improvement are welcome in this regard, and IPEM members are well placed to lead the cultural change envisaged.

It is essential that sufficient resources are made available for the recruitment and on-going training and development of staff (i.e. healthcare scientists & practitioners) required to support the safe and effective use of existing and novel technologies. NI has adopted the 'Modernising Scientific Careers' (MSC) training scheme for healthcare scientists and practitioners, which is structured to allow for future changes in service delivery and to maximise the benefits of new scientific and technological advances. However, as a small and specialised workforce, the majority of the available training for non-trainees is only available outside of Northern Ireland. This places an additional burden on

funding requirements that, coupled with limitations on training expenditure in recent years, has imposed a restriction on development of knowledge and skills perceived by some members as disproportionate.