

Prioritisation of issues identified through the horizon scanning process

Strategic delivery: Safe, ethical, effective treatment Consistent outcomes and support Improving standards through intelligence

Details:

Meeting Scientific and Clinical Advances Advisory Committee (SCAAC)

Agenda item 4

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Output:

For information or decision? For recommendation

Recommendation Members are asked to:

- note the issues identified as high priority through the horizon scanning process and consider whether any of the priorities should be amended;
- consider the high priority issues and work recommendations; and
- consider whether advice from additional external advisors would help in achieving the work recommendations.

Resource implications Depends on the number of issues the Committee agrees to be high priority

Implementation date The Committee work plan for 2020/2021

Communication(s) Work priorities (as defined by the Committee) will be communicated to the Head of Planning and Governance

Organisational risk Low Medium High

Annexes None

1. Background

- 1.1. The Authority established a horizon scanning function in 2004, the purpose of which is to identify issues that could have an impact on the field of assisted reproduction or embryo research. By identifying these issues, the Authority can be aware of potential licence applications and prepare, if necessary, a policy of position or relevant patient information.
- 1.2. Issues are identified from journal articles, conferences and contact with experts such as members of the Authority's Horizon Scanning Panel. The Horizon Scanning Panel is an international panel of experts who meet annually and are contacted via email throughout the year.
- 1.3. The horizon scanning process is an annual cycle that feeds into the business planning of the Executive, the Scientific and Clinical Advances Advisory Committee (SCAAC) and the Authority's consideration of ethical issues and standards.

2. Prioritisation process

- 2.1. To help with the business planning process, it is important for the Executive to be fully aware of which issues members consider to be high priority. New issues which have been identified this year have been categorised as high, medium or low priority using the following criteria:
 - Within the HFEA's remit
 - Timescale for likely introduction (2-3 years)
 - High patient demand/clinical use if it were to be introduced
 - Technically feasible
 - Ethical issues raised or public interest
- 2.2. New issues are high priority if they are within the HFEA's remit and meet at least two other criteria. New issues are medium if they are within the HFEA's remit and meet one other criteria or are outside of HFEA remit but meet at least two other criteria. Whilst low priority issues are those outside of HFEA's remit and unlikely to impact on research or treatment in the near future, published studies in these areas will continue to be collected and considered as part of the horizon scanning process.
- 2.3. High priority is also given to established techniques or issues which fall within the HFEA's remit and require ongoing monitoring or provision of patient information.

3. High priority issues

- 3.1. The Executive considers the following topics (not listed in any particular order) to be high priority for consideration in 2020/21. No new topics have been added to the high priority list based on horizon scanning findings:
 - a) Treatment add-ons
 - b) Artificial intelligence (AI)
 - c) Genome editing
 - d) Mitochondrial donation

- e) Synthetic human entities with embryo like features, “SHEEFs”
- f) Embryo culture media
- g) Health outcomes in children conceived by ART
- h) Alternative methods to derive embryonic and embryonic-like stem cells
- i) New technologies in embryo testing (including embryo biopsy and non-invasive methods for PGD)

3.2. Briefings have not been written for these high priority areas, as these topics are either standing items that are considered by the committee every year, or they have already been considered by the Committee recently.

4. Medium priority issues

4.1. The Executive considers the following topics (not listed in any particular order) to be medium priority for consideration in 2020/21.

- a) Impact of stress on fertility treatment outcomes
- b) Impact of the microbiome on fertility and fertility treatment outcomes

4.2. This has been done according to the prioritisation criteria ie they are outside of the HFEA’s remit but meet at least two other criteria and the HFEA are keen to continue their awareness of these issues.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Members are asked to:

- note the issues identified as high priority through the horizon scanning process and consider whether any of the priorities should be amended;
- consider the high priority issues and work recommendations; and
- consider whether advice from additional external advisors would help in achieving the work recommendations.