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PRESS RELEASE

NICE issues updated guidance on keyhole surgery for the treatment of colorectal cancer

New guidance published today by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommends laparoscopic (“keyhole”) surgery as an option for patients with colorectal cancer. The guidance, which replaces previous NICE guidance published in 2000, applies to patients in whom both laparoscopic and conventional open surgery would be considered as suitable options for treatment.

Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in the UK. Almost 30,000 new cases were registered in England and Wales in 2002, representing over 12% of all new cancer cases. In 70% to 80% of patients, complete excision of the tumour may be able to cure the condition. At present, the standard procedure for surgical resection of colorectal tumours uses the open approach to remove the tumour and the affected part of the large intestine via an abdominal incision.

Laparoscopic colorectal surgery involves inserting laparoscopic instruments through a number of holes in the abdominal wall to dissect tissues around the tumour. The tumour is then usually removed through an abdominal incision. The NICE guidance also applies to laparoscopically assisted surgery, in which the incision is enlarged to complete the dissection before the tumour is removed.

Professor David Barnett, Chair of the independent Appraisal Committee that produced the guidance, said: “When NICE produced its original guidance in 2000 there was a lack of evidence about the long term outcomes of the laparoscopic approach compared to the conventional open technique. That has now changed and recent evidence

indicates that the long term outcomes for patients are equivalent for both techniques. In addition there are important additional benefits associated with laparoscopic surgery, both in terms of shorter hospital stays and the ability of patients to return to normal activities post-operatively faster than with conventional surgery. This guidance makes it clear to the NHS and patients, no matter where they live in England and Wales, how and under what circumstances this procedure can add value so that those patients who can benefit from the procedure will now be able to do so.”

The NICE guidance on the use of laparoscopic surgery for colorectal cancer recommends that this should only be performed by surgeons who have completed appropriate training in the technique, and who perform this procedure often enough to maintain competence. The Appraisal Committee considered that appropriate training of surgeons and surgical teams is essential to ensure the clinical effectiveness and safety of the laparoscopic technique. Given the current shortage of surgeons skilled in this technique, NICE has today advised the Department of Health that they need to consider varying the usual three month period that the NHS is required to fund NICE technology appraisal guidance. The Department of Health are considering this request and will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Ends

Notes for editors

About NICE

1. NICE is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.
2. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:
 - **public health** – guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health for those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public and voluntary sector
 - **health technologies** – guidance on the use of new and existing medicines, treatments and procedures within the NHS
 - **clinical practice** – guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS.