Information sharing arrangements for EQA providers in interest of patient safety

Title	Information sharing arrangements for EQA providers in interest of patient safety
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1. Introduction and purpose

The following general guidance is produced for external quality assessment (EQA) providers that report performance into the UK National Quality Assurance Advisory Panel (NQAAP) framework and is available for NQAAP members, Quality Assurance in Pathology Committee (QAPC) members and EQA providers reporting UK performance to NQAAPs. This document describes how EQA providers can share information in the interest of patient safety.

2. Responsibilities

EQA providers are responsible for identifying laboratories to the NQAAP/QAPC where issues of performance are identified. However, on occasion performance issues may be related to the choice of methodology/instrumentation/technique. In cases where EQA providers are concerned that there is an issue they should directly escalate this to the MHRA as per the Escalation of EQA performance concerns policy (document WS20501), this decision is solely within the remit of the EQA provider. However, in cases where EQA providers do not have sufficient evidence based on their own operations to raise an issue with the MHRA, then they should highlight the concern with the relevant NQAAP and where possible take this forward with organisers of any other EQA programmes operating in the same area.

3. Procedures

3.1 For EQA providers identifying a potential patient safety issue

As the operators of the EQA schemes and holders of performance and methodological data any potential area of concerns relating to patient safety will be identified by EQA providers. Where an issue is clearly identified it should be formally raised with the MHRA via the Escalation of EQA performance concerns policy (document WS20501).

In cases where there is insufficient evidence for a formal procedure (such as insufficient user numbers for sufficient statistical analysis) then the EQA providers should raise their

concerns with the relevant NQAAP. This should be undertaken at the first available meeting after a potential patient safety issue is identified and should be raised in the open session of the NQAAP meeting, as an item of ‘Potential patient safety issue’ detailing the issue, the area of concern and the timeline for further investigation.

3.2 For NQAAPs

Where an area for investigation is highlighted by an EQA provider, the NQAAP chair should ensure that the issue is recorded in the minutes of the meeting with an action for any other EQA programmes operating in the same area to review their data and for all involved EQA providers to report their findings back to the NQAAP at the next meeting.

At any time during the investigations if sufficient evidence is found (by any EQA provider or combination of EQA providers) to support the concern the issue should be escalated as per the Escalation of EQA performance concerns policy (document WS20501).

The area of concern should remain as an action point on the NQAAP minutes and regularly reviewed until such a time as sufficient evidence is identified by the EQA providers to close the issue or escalate.

4. Related documents

Escalation of EQA performance concerns policy (WS20501)