

Good allergy practice

Standards of care for providers and purchasers of allergy services within the National Health Service

SUMMARY OF NEW RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PATHOLOGISTS

Allergy is a common and increasing cause of illness and there is concern amongst the public about the facilities available for its diagnosis and treatment within the NHS. For these reasons—*Good allergy practice* has been written specifically for providers and purchasers of allergy services.

Allergic diseases affect at least 15% of the population. They are a major cause of absence from work and school and present an important socio-economic problem. Some allergies are life threatening. It is now appreciated that the identification of allergens, both in the home and workplace, and the implementation of avoidance measures may not only improve prognosis but can appreciably reduce the amount and hence cost of drugs used to suppress symptoms.

Conditions in which a specialist allergist can help include:

- summer hayfever (seasonal, allergic, conjunctivorhinitis)
- perennial rhinitis (symptoms of a 'permanent cold')
- allergic asthma (including occupational asthma)
- allergy to stinging insects (especially wasps and bees)
- allergy to medicinal drugs
- allergy-related skin disorders, ie urticaria, angioedema, atopic eczema and contact dermatitis
- food allergy and food intolerance
- anaphylaxis (acute generalised allergic reaction)
- evaluation of the role of allergy in non-specific/polysymptomatic illness.

Allergies in children differ from those in adults. It is therefore important that a paediatrician is always involved in the diagnosis and management of allergic conditions in children or where allergy is suspected—sometimes incorrectly—in diseases such as hyperactivity or other forms of behavioural disorder, recurrent abdominal pain and chronic headache.

An allergy service within the NHS needs at least one specialist in allergy and clinical immunology for every three health districts (or approximately 750,000 of the population). The specialist will be either a physician immunologist trained in the newly recognised specialty of clinical immunology and allergy, or be an organ based specialist with an interest in allergy. The Royal

Colleges of Physicians have recently approved training programmes and allocated 12 new senior registrar posts in clinical immunology and allergy ('physician immunologists') approved by JPAC and it is proposed to increase still further the number of consultant physicians who have had formal training in allergy.

The facilities and staff required for a good allergy clinic include:

- Designated areas within a hospital for adult and paediatric allergy clinics.
- A well organised appointment system with sufficient time for first consultation and provision for follow-up visits.
- The services of a specially trained allergy clinic nurse. The services of a qualified adult and paediatric dietitian should also be available, especially in clinics which deal with many cases of food allergy.
- Facilities for testing for allergy should include: skin prick tests, patch tests, food allergy tests.
- Where laboratory investigations are needed (eg haematology and biochemistry services and certain immunological tests), but are not available in a district hospital, arrangements should exist to refer patients to an appropriate regional immunology centre with consultant immunologist advice.

The recommendations include a summary of the advice given by the British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology on procedures and safeguards for specific allergen injection immunotherapy (used only for severe summer hayfever or allergy to stinging insects).

The recommendations stress that purchasers and providers of allergy services should use only methods of diagnosis and treatment that have been rigorously assessed and are of proven efficacy.

The standards of care set out in this document are supported by the British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology and the British Allergy Foundation.

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Good Allergy Practice is available from the Publications Department of the Royal College of Physicians, Price £5.00 (overseas £6.00)