

ACADEMY MEETING 22 JULY 2010

Adapting medical regulation for the telemedicine era

Background

At the March meeting of the Academy consideration was given to a paper from Andy Adam on the need for regulation of providers and practitioners of tele-medicine services provided to patients in the UK. A small group comprising Andy Adam, Peter Furness, John Lee and Sol Mead met to take forward the issue. The group has produced the statement below.

Statement

Telemedicine is growing and offers many opportunities for UK healthcare delivery. However British patients remain unprotected by current UK medical regulation that does not include all telemedicine practitioners who may interpret their imaging investigations (Teleradiology), e-prescribe for them (Teleprescribing), investigate tissue samples and biopsies (Telepathology) or e-monitor them (Telemonitoring).

Telemedicine should be regulated like all other forms of medicine and should meet the same safety standards.

The Care Quality Commission should require all providers of medical services to ensure that they can verify the qualifications and registration status of every doctor providing medical services to UK patients, wherever that doctor is located. This should include an individual assessment of their revalidation requirements. Health care providers should not rely on contractual arrangements between telemedicine companies and their employees, nor on indemnity provided by these companies, to guarantee the quality of patient care.

Patients should be made aware if part of their care is devolved to a doctor working outside the UK. However, the UK-based health care provider who commissions a telemedicine-based service must remain legally liable for any damage that may arise as a result of poor medical care, whether delivered conventionally or by telemedicine. The UK-based healthcare provider must not be allowed to devolve this responsibility to a telemedicine provider.

All doctors providing medical services to patients in the UK, whether locally or by telemedicine, should be required by health care providers to register with the General Medical Council. Ultimately this should be a legal requirement.

Recommendation

The Academy is asked to consider the attached statement and agree appropriate action.

Alastair Henderson
Chief Executive
July 2010