

Dear Colleague

## AREA CLINICAL FORUMS

### Purpose

1. Area Clinical Forums (ACFs) are now an established and important part of NHS Boards in Scotland, reflecting the development of integrated organisational arrangements. The respective functions and roles of ACFs and their Chairs are set out in Annex A. The purpose of this guidance (complementing the existing guidance<sup>1</sup>) is to ensure that NHS Boards further develop and enhance the role of ACFs and the individual professional committees which advise on profession specific issues. This is based on the findings of a review undertaken by the National ACF Chairs Group; and ongoing engagement with the National ACF Chairs Group. In addition, this guidance encourages the establishment of arrangements for systematic clinical engagement across all NHS Scotland organisations, not just territorial NHS Boards. Essentially, this means raising the profile and status of the ACF in order to maximise the contribution which clinicians can make to the planning and delivery of services across the NHS in Scotland. ACFs and their constituent members have a key role in taking forward the key dimensions of quality described in the NHSScotland Healthcare Quality Strategy<sup>2</sup>. Developing ACFs within this broader strategic context aims to harness the knowledge, skills and commitment of clinicians across NHSScotland.

### Background

2. The National ACF Chairs Group has undertaken work to provide a framework for the future development of ACFs. This guidance sets out areas for NHS Boards to focus on to maximise the contribution of their ACF. In addition the National ACF Chairs Group is working with the Scottish Government Health Directorates to: ensure national policy development and implementation reflects the perspective of frontline clinicians; ongoing development of the ACF component in the Annual Review with Scottish Ministers; and, that the ACF Chairs individually and collectively receive development support.

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### Addresses

#### For action

Chief Executives, NHS  
Boards  
Chief Executives, Special  
Health Boards

#### For information

Chairs, NHS Boards  
Chairs, Special Health  
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### Enquiries to:

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<sup>1</sup> [HDL\(2003\)11 A Framework for Reform: Devolved Decision Making: Moving Towards Single System Working](#)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/NHS-Scotland/NHSQuality>

## Development and Support at NHS Board Level

3. The review of the functioning of ACFs has identified a number of key areas to further strengthen the work of ACFs:

- professional advisory structures need to be kept under review to ensure they are fit for purpose, reflect local circumstances and provide authoritative advice to the NHS Board on relevant matters. Such an approach could be supported by a clinical engagement strategy with local monitoring undertaken by the ACF
- arrangements for ACF meetings and meetings of professional advisory committees should recognise the need to ensure clinical professionals have the necessary time and support to make a full contribution to the work of the NHS Board
- all clinical professional disciplines should be provided with the opportunity to participate in professional advisory structures either through existing professional advisory committees or new arrangements – this is particularly applicable to groups such as healthcare scientists and clinical psychologists
- ACFs need to link to key governance functions and organisational structures within the local NHS system including Community Health Partnerships, and through the established public involvement arrangements of the NHS Board
- executive level engagement, including the chief executive, is seen as an important way of developing, supporting and driving the business of the ACF. Executive director sponsorship of each professional advisory committee lends support to the work of the ACF
- ACFs and constituent professional advisory committees need effective business management support to: support the chairs and members; facilitate effective communications; and to ensure the business of the ACF and the professional advisory committees can be reconciled with key business going through the NHS Board by timely dissemination of papers and co-ordination of responses
- participation by clinical professionals in the work of the ACF and the professional advisory committees should be promoted as an important contribution to the work of the NHS Board as well as an important development opportunity for those involved
- the benefits of developing and strengthening communication and networking arrangements for clinical professionals – particularly with regard to patient safety, person-centredness and clinical effectiveness as described in the NHSScotland Healthcare Quality Strategy – should be promoted

## National Support Arrangements

4. The Scottish Government recognises the benefits to NHSScotland of ensuring the ACF Chairs are supported and developed individually and through their participation in the National ACF Chairs Group in order to inform policy development and implementation. This includes a development programme, networking opportunities, and engagement with Scottish Government Health Directorates policy leads. In addition the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing meets with the National ACF Chairs Group on a regular basis. The National ACF Chairs Group will also help to ensure the continued development of the ACF component of the Annual Reviews between Scottish Ministers and NHS Boards. The

introduction of role specific training and development opportunities for NHS Board ACF members is an integral part of the NHSScotland 'Framework for Developing Boards'.

### **Action for NHS Boards**

5. NHS Boards should:

- (a) ensure effective arrangements are in place to promote and encourage the active involvement of all clinicians from across the local NHS system or, for non territorial NHS Boards from across the organisation to inform NHS Board decision making processes.
- (b) consider what steps are necessary to develop local professional advisory structures to underpin the design and delivery of high quality patient services in line with the dimensions set out at paragraph 3 above.
- (c) ensure that the effectiveness of the ACF and professional advisory arrangements are kept under review to maximise the quality of the advice provided on the Board's strategic objectives. This can be supported by ensuring the length of the appointment of the ACF Chair offers sufficient opportunity to develop and deliver a strategic work programme, as well as building experience and ensuring continuity.
- (d) assess the training and development needs of those involved, together with arrangements for succession planning and development of future clinical leaders.
- (e) develop a communication strategy (including, for example, through a variety of media, local conferences and events) to support and promote the work of the ACF and the professional advisory committees.
- (f) assess the impact of the ACF on the business of the NHS Board and highlight key achievements reflecting the outcomes of the ACF work programme.

### **Action for Special Health Boards**

6. Special Health Boards should develop arrangements for clinical engagement in accordance with the circumstances of each organisation, taking full account of the points set out above. In addition, arrangements for the participation of clinical representatives in the National ACF Chairs Group should be supported.

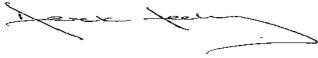
### **Next Steps**

7. The Scottish Government will continue to support the development of ACFs. Progress by NHS Boards in the implementation of this guidance will be kept under review through existing performance management arrangements including NHS Board Annual Reviews and through engagement with the National ACF Chairs Group.

## Further Information

8. For further information please contact Colin Brown, Quality Division on 0131 244 3471 or by email: [colin.brown3@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:colin.brown3@scotland.gsi.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely



**DEREK FEELEY**  
**DIRECTOR OF HEALTHCARE POLICY AND STRATEGY**

## Annex A

### Composition of Area Clinical Forums

It is for NHS Boards to determine the establishment of professional advisory committees<sup>3</sup> which can include:

- medical
- dental
- nursing and midwifery
- pharmaceutical
- optometric
- allied health professionals
- healthcare scientists
- clinical psychologists

All clinical professional disciplines should be provided with the opportunity to participate in professional advisory structures either through existing professional advisory committees or new arrangements.

### Role of the Area Clinical Forum

In each NHS Board area, the chairs of the professional advisory committees (listed above) form a multiprofessional Area Clinical Forum. Core functions include:

- reviewing the business of professional advisory committees to ensure co-ordination of clinical matters across each of the professional groups;
- the provision of a clinical perspective on the development of the Local Delivery Plan and the strategic objectives of the NHS Board;
- sharing best practice and encouraging multiprofessional working in healthcare and health improvement;
- ensuring effective and efficient engagement of clinicians in service design, development and improvement;
- providing a local clinical and professional perspective on national policy issues;
- ensuring that local strategic and corporate developments fully reflect clinical service delivery;
- taking an integrated clinical and professional perspective on the impact of national policies at local level;
- through the ACF Chair, being fully engaged in NHS Board business; and
- supporting the NHS Board in the conduct of its business through the provision of multiprofessional clinical advice.

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<sup>3</sup> Section 9 of the NHS (Scotland) 1978 Act provides the framework for 'local consultative committees'  
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## Role of the Area Clinical Forum Chair

The current policy is that the Chair of the ACF will be recommended to Scottish Ministers for appointment as a non executive member of the NHS Board<sup>4</sup> and has an important role in terms of:

- providing a multiprofessional clinical perspective on strategy development and service delivery issues considered by the NHS Board;
- explaining the work of the NHS Board and promoting opportunities for clinicians to be involved in decision making locally;
- championing multiprofessional co-operation across the clinical disciplines and providing a vital link between the NHS Board and the ACF; and
- actively participating in national arrangements to promote and develop the role of ACFs.

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<sup>4</sup> See SSI 2010 No.50 Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 (Amendment of Specified Authorities) Order 2010