



CCG Policy On Statins: Save Cash Before Lives

Stockport's Clinical Commissioning Group has been strongly criticised for refusing to implement official guidance on drugs for people with a small, but real risk of heart attack and stroke. The postcode lottery has arrived in the borough.

In 2014 the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence told GPs to prescribe statins for patients with a 10% cardiovascular risk, indicated mainly by cholesterol levels. The Institute (known as NICE) had previously backed statins only for those with a 20% or greater risk.

Stockport CCG declined to implement the new guidance on grounds of cost. It also instructed Stockport's GPs to prescribe a type of statin that costs less than the one endorsed by NICE. The CCG was told that elsewhere in Greater Manchester the NICE guidance was being followed.

Professor Mark Baker of NICE told the journal Pulse that cardiovascular disease kills one in three people. He said the CCG was "denying patients access to the most effective means of reducing that risk."

Dr Andrew Green, chair of the General Practice Council's clinical and prescribing sub-committee, said that because of financial pressures on CCGs "we are beginning to see some very strange decisions born out of desperation."

Stockport CCG is struggling to stay within its budget because of underfunding by the Government. In early 2015 the CCG's officers responsible for financial savings overruled a recommendation by their Clinical Policy Committee to follow NICE's guidance on statins for people with 10% cardiovascular risk.

The Clinical Policy Committee also got nowhere with a half-hearted suggestion that money should be found for NICE-endorsed Atorvastatin rather than a cheaper statin (Simvastatin).

As part of its cost-control strategy, the CCG is looking out for opportunities to move patients on to cheaper drugs. Even patients who have suffered a heart attack can only receive Atorvastatin until they have stabilised.

NICE says Atorvastatin is more potent and easier to take than Simvastatin. It is also less likely to react with other drugs, such as those for high blood pressure. NICE advises that attempts should be made to address diet, exercise and smoking before statins are offered for raised cholesterol.

The financial crisis in the NHS is worsening at the same time that leaders of Stockport CCG, Devo Manc, NHS England and the Government are claiming to be improving health care. Their claims do not ring true; the CCG's denial of recommended cardiovascular treatment shows the reality.