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BUGWATCH!

The four Health & Social Services Councils are getting serious about healthcare acquired infection and will today launch a week of Bugwatch surveys in the major acute hospitals in Northern Ireland to promote a partnership approach to preventing and controlling infection.

Bugwatch week will begin with a four Council survey at the Royal Hospitals as one of the major regional healthcare providers in Northern Ireland. This will be followed later in the week by surveys of Altnagelvin, Antrim, Belfast City, Causeway, Craigavon, Daisy Hill and the Mater. The Councils, who raise concerns about infection prevention and control with Health Boards and Trusts on behalf of the public and patients, have co-ordinated Bugwatch week with the ending of the public consultation on the new Northern Ireland Infection Control Strategy 'Protecting Patients and Staff'.

"It is important to make patients, hospital visitors and the public aware of the facts about infection prevention and control and the part that they can play in preventing the spread of infection." says Patricia McMillan, Chair

of the Eastern Health & Social Services Council. "Healthcare acquired infections can be present in all healthcare facilities, not just hospitals. However, we have begun our surveys in acute hospitals because the public often feel most concerned about the possible risks there. One of the outcomes that we would like to see from the strategy is relevant and targeted information being produced for patients and the public."

However, the Councils want to stress that the fact that these visits are happening does not mean that the hospitals surveyed have particular problems. Just that they are committed to working in partnership with patients to tackle infection.

Paddy Magowan, Chair, Western Health & Social Services Council comments, "The Councils believe that infection prevention and control is an important matter in public confidence in our healthcare. We will be feeding back the results of our surveys to Trust Chief Executives."

"Hospitals are putting in place increasingly robust measures to prevent infection," says Nasy Harris, Vice-Chair of the Southern Health & Social Services Council. "The aim of Bugwatch is to promote a partnership approach that will encourage patients to feel comfortable in raising any concerns that they might have with staff."

"The Councils were set up to represent the views and opinions of the public," adds Tom Creighton, Chair, Northern Health & Social Services Council. "The Bugwatch surveys are part of our lay monitoring function. We have worked in partnership with Trust Chief Executives to organise these surveys and are very appreciative of the support that we have received."

Supporting the Councils' initiative, Dr Lorraine Doherty, Senior Medical Officer at the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety said, "The fight against healthcare acquired infections is one of the Department's highest priorities. The introduction of 'Bugwatch' is one of the recommendations in the Northern Ireland Infection Control Strategy document which aims to tackle the problems of healthcare associated infections head-on. Protecting patients and staff from infection is everyone's responsibility. Patient and public involvement in infection control are vital if we are to work together to tackle the problem. The results of this initiative will be fed back to the participating Trusts and the Department will form part of the consultation response to the Infection Control Strategy."

Ends

- NI Infection Control Strategy

'Protecting Patients and Staff: A Strategy for Prevention and Control of Healthcare Associated Infections in Northern Ireland 2005-2010' has been developed by the DHSSPS. The four Health & Social Services Councils have been represented at Working Group level and have been actively involved in the pre-consultation stage of the Strategy.

Bugwatch surveys (based on a model developed by the Commission for Public and Patient Involvement in Health in England) will be undertaken by the four Councils to respond to public concerns about healthcare acquired infection rates. This has been planned as part of the four

Health & Social Services Council's work programme, which includes the lay monitoring of Health and Personal Social Services facilities. It coincides with the development of the Northern Ireland Infection Control Strategy 'Protecting Patients & Staff'.

The Bugwatch survey involves observation of hygiene and related procedures such as availability of hand washing or cleansing facilities on wards, displaying of advice to visitors, etc. The findings of the survey will inform the Councils' ongoing work in representing the public in relation to infection control.

Notes to Editors

- Health and Social Services Councils were set up in 1991 to represent the views of patients and users of the health and social services. Council members are made up of 40% of whom are nominated by District Councils in each Area. The remainder are appointed by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety – 30% voluntary/community representatives and 30% are nominees with an interest in health and social care.
- Health and Social Services Councils have a right to be consulted by Health and Social Services Boards about and plans for development of services, or where significant changes are being considered. Councils play an important part in representing the views of consumers of services to the decision makers, and provide advice and support to patients and service users in relation to complaints procedures.

If you require any further information please contact :

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