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AUDIT SCOTLAND

Press release

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Improvements needed in management of medical equipment

A follow up report into the management of medical equipment finds that there is still room for substantial improvement across Scotland. It calls on the health service at local level and the SEHD (Scottish Executive Health Department) at national level to take further steps to minimise risks to patients.

“There are significant risks for patients where medical equipment is not managed well,” said Deputy Auditor General Caroline Gardner. “For example if medical equipment is not available when needed, is badly maintained or is not used properly. Failure to manage these risks can result in poor quality patient care. However many trusts were not able to provide basic information about some of these areas.

“For example, while investment in medical equipment procurement and maintenance is substantial, Audit Scotland could not accurately quantify this due to lack of reliable data. Nevertheless, the report expresses concern about the levels of investment in new equipment.

“Given that 25 per cent of the medical equipment we looked at was beyond its standard (expected) life, we believe that some trusts are still relying heavily on old equipment. Trusts need sufficient investment to replace medical equipment as it ages and to meet changes in services and technology.”

In addition, only half the trusts had comprehensive systems that could provide assurance that those operating diagnostic or therapeutic equipment had a sufficient understanding of it to do so in a safe and efficient manner. “This doesn’t necessarily mean that trusts are not training staff properly, but they do need to be able to show that training has taken place and that proper systems are in place,” said Ms Gardner.

The report carries a number of key recommendations for the NHS in Scotland, including:

- Ensuring staff training is carried out and is properly recorded
- Ensuring investment programmes are adequate
- Improving the quality of management information available

The report also found that medical equipment is not being given sufficient attention at policy and senior management level. This is important in order to ensure that needs are assessed, investment programmes are prioritised and realistic and that performance is monitored on the basis of good information.

Today’s report by Audit Scotland revisited some of the problem areas identified in ‘*Equipped to care’* published in 2001. The original study found some key weaknesses, although some aspects were managed well, including procurement processes and response times for equipment failure.

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Notes to Editors

1. Audit Scotland looked at a wide variety of equipment involved in patient diagnosis and treatment in all trusts throughout Scotland. For example, CT scanners, x-ray units, syringe pumps, defibrillators and endoscopes.

2. Existing equipment is reckoned to be worth around £630 million, while Audit Scotland estimates at least £130 million is spent annually on equipment and maintenance.

3. The report, *Managing Medical Equipment*, is available on the Audit Scotland website www.audit-scot.gov.uk from the morning of publication, Thursday 26 February 2004.

4. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Executive and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.

5. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission.