

## The safety and effectiveness of methods of ear wax removal

### Introduction

The aim of the HTA programme is to ensure that high quality research information on the costs, effectiveness and broader impact of health technologies is produced in the most efficient way for those who use, manage, provide care in or develop policy for the NHS. Topics for research are identified and prioritised to meet the needs of the NHS. Health technology assessment forms the largest portfolio of work in the NHS Research and Development Programme and each year about fifty new studies are commissioned to help answer questions of direct importance to the NHS. The studies include both primary research and evidence synthesis.

### Question

*What is the safety, effectiveness and cost effectiveness of different methods of ear wax removal?*

- 1 Technology:** All methods of ear wax removal.
- 2 Patient group:** Adults and children presenting with build up of ear wax requiring removal.
- 3 Setting:** Primary or secondary care.
- 4 Control or comparator treatment:** N/A
- 5 Design:** Research is required in the form of evidence synthesis to review the safety, effectiveness and cost effectiveness of different methods of removal of ear wax. The evidence synthesis will consist of i) a literature review and ii) an economic model of management of ear wax.
- 6 Outcomes:** 1) Hearing measure, 2) quality of life, 3) time to recurrence, 4) cost effectiveness, 5) adverse events, 6) identification of two or three frontrunner technologies for further primary research.

#### **Background to commissioning brief:**

*Problems attributed to the accumulation of wax (cerumen) are one of the most common reasons for people to present to primary care with ear related symptoms. Cerumen removal is not without potential hazards: complications include failure of wax removal; pain, tinnitus, or vertigo; otitis media or otitis externa; damage to the skin of the external canal, and perforation of the tympanic membrane.*

*Research is required in the form of evidence synthesis with economic modelling to review the safety, effectiveness and cost effectiveness of different methods of removal of ear wax..*

### Making an application

If you wish to submit a proposal on this topic, complete the electronic application form and return it, along with a detailed project description, to the HTA Commissioning Manager at the National Coordinating Centre for Health Technology Assessment, Mailpoint 728, Boldrewood, University of Southampton, Southampton SO16 7PX by **7 February 2007**.

Your full proposal will be assessed by designated Commissioning Board members, alongside other applications submitted in the same topic area. They will create a shortlist of not more than three proposals to be taken forward for peer review by external referees. Should your proposal be short listed, it will be reviewed by the HTA Commissioning Board at its meeting in **July 2007**.

***Applications received after 1300 hours on the due date will not be considered.***

***Please see GUIDANCE ON APPLICATIONS overleaf.***

## Guidance on applications

### Methods

Applicants should demonstrate knowledge of current research in the field and of systematic review methods and state how these would apply to the question posed. Valid and reliable methods should be proposed for identifying and selecting relevant material, assessing its quality and synthesising the results. Guidance on choice of appropriate methods is contained in NHS CRD Report 4 *Undertaking systematic reviews of research on effectiveness* ([www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/report4.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/report4.htm)). Where policy implications are considered, the emphasis should be on assessing the likely effects of a range of policy options open to decision makers rather than a judgement on any single strategy. Where epidemiological modelling or economic evaluation is required, the range of uncertainty associated with the results should be assessed. In the assessment of cost-effectiveness, further data collection may be required to estimate resource use and costs. If there is evidence that the ratio of costs and benefits may differ between readily identifiable groups, applicants are encouraged to state how they will identify these differences.

### Cochrane

Applicants wishing to produce and maintain a Cochrane systematic review from this HTA commissioned systematic review should make the case in their proposal. This will need to include the approval of the relevant Cochrane Review Group ([www.cochrane.org](http://www.cochrane.org)). Any additional costs associated with the initial preparation of a Cochrane review should be included in your project proposal. Maintenance costs cannot be met.

### Public involvement in research

The HTA programme recognises the increasing active involvement of members of the public in research and would like to support research projects appropriately. The HTA programme encourages applicants to consider *how* the scientific quality, feasibility or practicality of their proposal *might* be improved by involving members of the public. Research teams wishing to involve members of the public should include in their application: the aims of active involvement in this project; a description of the members of the public (to be) involved; a description of the methods of involvement; and an appropriate budget. Applications that involve members of the public will not, for that reason alone, be favoured over proposals that do not but it is hoped that the involvement of members of the public will improve the quality of the application.

### Updating

It is the policy of the NCCHTA that all search strategies undertaken as part of evidence synthesis/secondary research projects must not be more than 12 months out of date when the draft final report is submitted. We expect that most projects will manage to bring their searches up to date prior to analysis and writing up. As research funders we are aware that exceptional circumstances can apply that would not allow this to be the case but this must be the exception rather than the rule and will be assessed on a case by case basis. The expectation is that projects funded by the HTA programme will deliver information that is both relevant and timely.

In addition, in order to inform decisions on whether and when to update the review, researchers will be expected to give some indication of how fast the evidence base is changing in the field concerned, based on the nature and volume of ongoing work known at the time the review is completed. Applicants should note that they will not be expected to carry out any future updating as part of the contract to complete the review.

### Communication

Communication of the results of research to decision makers in the NHS is central to the HTA Programme. Successful applicants will be required to submit a single final report for publication by the HTA programme. They are also required to communicate their work through peer-reviewed journals and may also be asked to support the NCCHTA in further efforts to ensure that results are readily available to all relevant parties in the NHS. Where findings demonstrate continuing uncertainty, these should be highlighted as areas for further research.

### Timescale

There are no fixed limits on the duration of projects or funding. However, there is a pressing need within the NHS for the information and so the research would normally be expected to be completed as soon as possible – however it is for applicants to justify the duration and costs proposed.