

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

NICE Quality Standards Consultation – Obesity prevention and lifestyle weight management in children

Closing date: 5pm – Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> August 2014

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In order to guide your comments, please refer to the general points for consideration on the NICE website as well as the specific questions detailed within the quality standard.

Section	Comments
	<p>These comments draw upon the conclusions and recommendations of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics' report '<i>Public health: ethical issues</i>' published in 2007 (available at: <a href="http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/public-health">www.nuffieldbioethics.org/public-health</a>). The report starts from the position that the state has a duty to enable everybody to lead a healthy life. It proposes a 'stewardship model' that outlines the ethical principles that should be considered by public health policy makers.</p> <p>Paragraph numbers in brackets refer to paragraph numbers in the report.</p>
<p><b>Quality statement 2:</b> Head teachers and chairs of governors, in collaboration with parents and pupils, assess the school environment and ensure that the school's policies encourage children and young people to maintain a healthy weight, eat a healthy diet and be physically active.</p>	<p>Much attention has been focused on the role of schools in addressing childhood obesity, as education plays a central role in providing individuals with the capacity to choose healthy behaviours. It is unreasonable to expect interventions in schools alone to be sufficient to reduce the prevalence of obesity, given the vast array of other influences experienced by children. However, school communities do provide an important means of influencing many of the socio-cultural factors that have a lasting impact on both food choices and exercise habits. They have a prominent role in the community, are a source of support for parents and families, and can produce community change in environments, knowledge and behaviour. For these reasons, it is appropriate for schools to seek to influence positively the food and exercise habits of children (paragraph 5.35).</p> <p>The stewardship model's emphasis on circumstances that help people to lead healthy lives, especially if they are in vulnerable positions (paragraphs 2.41–2.44), leads to an ethical justification for the state to</p>

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	<p>intervene in schools to achieve a more positive culture towards food, cooking and physical activity. As in many other areas of public health policy, the only way of establishing whether a new policy is likely to lead to improved health is by trialling it.</p> <p>The Council recommended that UK Government departments responsible for food, health and education should develop long-term strategies for schools with the aim of preventing obesity, and changing food and exercise culture, accompanied by monitoring and follow up (paragraph 5.36). Whilst we therefore welcome the proposal for schools to assess their environments to develop policies, we would wish to emphasise that the policies should be monitored in the long term and assessed for impact in improving health, in order that optimisations or amendments can be made as appropriate.</p>
<p><b>Quality statement 3:</b> Local authorities and their partners in the community develop a coordinated local physical activity strategy to promote the benefits of physical activity, highlight the risks of sedentary behaviour and increase the opportunities for children and young people (and their families and/or carers, as appropriate) to be physically active.</p>	<p>The Council concluded that more could be done in the design of urban environments and buildings to reduce the obesogenic nature of the environment and increase the opportunities for people to increase their energy expenditure with ease.</p> <p>We endorse the statement based on our recommendation that planning decisions by central and local government should include the objective of encouraging people to be physically active. This may entail some restrictions of people's freedoms, for instance to drive anywhere they wish to, but these restrictions would be justified in terms of public health benefits (paragraph 5.32).</p>

