Pharmac and medical device purchasing

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Medical Devices – The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly

Compared with countries such as Australia, Canada, USA and the UK, New Zealand has an unregulated medical devices market. In addition, unlike pharmaceuticals, which have been carefully appraised by PHARMAC using health technology assessment (HTA) tools, medical devices have not been routinely subjected to HTA prior to funding and procurement decisions.

In the 4 northern DHBs there has been a process for such HTA but it has been on a relatively small scale. The future landscape is changing dramatically with a new regulatory agency coming into being – the Therapeutic Products Authority, HTA about to be done by PHARMAC in a similar fashion to that for drugs, and an approved medical devices list being assembled – with an exceptions process (similar to the Named Patient Pharmaceutical Assessment process).

Anaesthesia and Intensive care facilities use a wide range of medical devices, some of which have been recalled by regulatory agencies and others of which have been associated with lawsuits. In the new environment it will be important to understand the pathways and processes to allow ongoing technological advancement whilst remaining cognizant of fiscal constraints. The future should see a fairer and more consistent approach to medical device evaluation and implementation but there will be added encumbrances.