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Department of Health consultation:
UK Influenza Preparedness Strategy 2011

Comments submitted by the Faculty of
Pharmaceutical Medicine (FPM)

17/06/11

The Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK (FPM) welcomes the publication of the UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy 2011 and the opportunity for consultation.

Whilst the H1N1 virus was not as lethal as had been feared, and the numbers of those made seriously ill by the virus was much lower than anticipated, lessons should be learned from past experience and incorporated into future plans. The FPM would like the following comments to be taken into consideration when finalising the strategy:

- The FPM would recommend that there needs to be a stronger focus on improving healthcare professional (HCP) uptake rates for seasonal flu vaccination as these have remained very low, and within the pandemic, HCP uptake of pandemic vaccine (while better than seasonal) has also been low.
- The FPM welcomes confirmation of a “UK wide approach”, in that the spread of a pandemic influenza is not limited by geographical boundaries or public service structures. A cross-Government, multi-agency, UK wide approach is essential in the face of such an emergency. The Hine Review highlighted the need for greater co-ordination between the devolved administrations at all levels for strategic planning. The FPM would endorse this recommendation. Plans need to be constantly reviewed and updated throughout a pandemic.
- With respect to communication and information exchange; experiences during the recent H1N1 pandemic underline the importance and value of good communication. The FPM believes that during the pandemic period, clarifying the relationship between the seasonal and pandemic flu, and providing accurate information on the rationale for vaccination and the risks and benefits to individuals and the wider community, could have been better handled.

Learning from this would avoid confusion about seasonal flu vaccines, and thereby increase the uptake rates of pandemic flu vaccines.

- The FPM believes that routine immunisation plays a vital role in the prevention of ill health among the population, including the most vulnerable. It is of concern therefore, that little consideration and planning appear to have been given to the continuation of scheduled immunisation programmes and how these are to be managed by the NHS during a pandemic period. These programmes include childhood vaccines, as well as seasonal influenza.