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1. **BACKGROUND**

The health-care system cannot afford to provide unlimited health services to everyone irrespective of cost. Accordingly choices must be made whereby, access to some services must be given priority, and access to others must be limited.

Some decisions to limit services are at present taken at Ministerial level (for example, the decision not to provide optometric or dental services). However, many such decisions are taken within hospitals. Although governments claim to provide access to all "necessary" in-hospital health services, they oblige hospitals to restrict their services by limiting their budgets, leaving them to decide precisely which services they should limit.

In general, hospitals are not well equipped to meet the challenge of prioritizing their services. Recognizing this, the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) has created the Technology Assessment Unit (TAU) to give advice on specific difficult resource allocation decisions, and to develop a process by which the taking of such decisions should be approached.

2. **THE TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT UNIT**

The Health Technology Assessment Unit was established by the MUHC in June 2001. Its purpose is to advise the hospital in difficult resource allocation decisions, using an approach based on sound, scientific technology assessment, and a transparent, fair decision-making process. Consistent with its role within a University Health Centre, it publishes its research when appropriate, and contributes to the training of personnel in the field of health technology assessment.
3. **DEFINITIONS**

- **Health Technology** refers here to the equipment, drugs, and procedures used by health care professionals, and the systems within which they are used.

- **The MUHC** is a single corporate structure including six hospital sites, the Montreal Children's Hospital (MCH), The Montreal General Hospital (MGH), The Montreal Chest Institute (MCI), The Montreal Neurological Hospital (MNH), the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) and The Lachine Hospital.

4. **PRINCIPLES**

   In fulfilling its mandate the TAU is guided by the following principles:

- **The TAU is advisory.** Responsibility for decision making is unchanged. TAU is not a part of the formal required decision making process for any MUHC decisions.

- **A primary role of TAU is to provide the hospital Administration with Health Technology Assessments (HTAs).** Decisions concerning the acquisition or continuing use of a technology should be informed by reliable estimates of the efficacy, safety and costs of that technology, and by an awareness of any legal or ethical issues that may be relevant to its acquisition. The TAU develops HTAs which provide this information.

- **An additional role of TAU is to develop Policy Recommendations (PRs).** Resource allocation decisions cannot be taken on the basis of the data provided by HTAs alone. Such decisions are largely subjective, determined also by the values of the decision makers. Accordingly, policy recommendations are developed by, a Policy Committee that is representative of the hospital community, and sensitive to its values.(See 5 below).
- **Transparency is essential for the acceptance of decisions.**
  Accordingly, the data and the reasoning behind recommendations should be made widely available.

5. **TAU STAFF AND TAU POLICY COMMITTEE**

TAU therefore consists of two separate entities, a professional staff to develop HTAs, and a Policy Committee to recommend what policy should be adopted by the Hospital in light of the HTA.

*The professional staff includes* full time and part-time Research Associates, an Administrator and a Director. (Full or part time)

*The Policy Committee* (honorary) consists of ten institutional representatives (nurses, medical doctors, other health professionals and patients, each nominated by their respective Associations, and a representative of the Administration nominated by the Executive Director). (The term “TAU Executive committee” is sometimes used at the MUHC interchangeably with the term “TAU Policy Committee”.) In addition, one or two Professional representatives are appointed to represent the potential users of the technology in question.

6. **GOVERNANCE**

The TAU is managed by a Director who is responsible for professional matters to the Policy Committee. For management issues the Director of the TAU reports to the Director of Quality, Patient Safety and Performance Process of the MUHC.

TAU follows the following process, when developing reports:

*Topic* Suggestions for review topics are invited from the hospital administration, the clinical and administrative departments, and the hospital community. The decision to accept a topic for review is made by the TAU on the grounds of such factors as: contentiousness, a potentially large economic impact, marginal or unproven effectiveness, or an unfavorable cost-
effectiveness. Most issues are reviewed at the request of the hospital administration. To avoid duplication of effort, agencies, or hospitals that might be involved in technology evaluation are contacted, before a new project is initiated.

**Involvement of relevant discipline** Throughout the review process, there is involvement of the department or discipline responsible for the technology in question. One or more members from that department or discipline serve as technical resource personnel and as noted above are coopted onto the Policy Committee for the duration of the study in question.

**Technology Assessment** Production of an HTA that contains reliable data on the economic impact, effectiveness, and cost-effectiveness is the task of the professional staff.

**Policy Recommendation** In developing policy recommendations the Policy Committee reviews the evidence developed in the Technology Assessment, and when necessary obtains additional evidence on such issues as opportunity costs, legal or ethical issues, and the feelings and opinions of the hospital community.

**Communication** Health Technology Assessments and Policy Recommendations are submitted to the hospital authorities through the Director General. Within a period of two weeks they are made public and posted on the WEB [www.mcgill.ca/tau/](http://www.mcgill.ca/tau/), Where appropriate they are edited and submitted to professional journals.

**Updates.** HTAs and Recommendations are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary

**Evaluation** The TAU conducts a regular review to determine the impact of its reports on hospital policy.