

THE POLITICS OF HYPERTENSION: HOW NICE IS NICE?

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) recently issued guidelines for the management of hypertension. Press coverage for the launch of these guidelines was relatively high and concentrated on the medical treatments recommended and their likely costs. Hypertension is undeniably a major problem in the UK and the medical consequences have major implications for individuals, the health service and the wider community. In the face of this problem, does NICE have the answers or is NICE in effect too nice?

There are many factors involved in hypertension, as any reader of this journal knows. These factors have their roots in the political, economic and personal decisions that are made by government, business and individuals. As such, the extent of hypertension can be viewed as a very sensitive indicator of the effectiveness of that decision making. From its high prevalence, it is therefore possible to conclude that somewhere along the line the decisions that are being made are wrong.

NICE would have us believe, as would government, that individuals are to blame through their poor eating habits, excessive caffeine and alcohol consumption and their physical laziness. The culture of harm reduction and victim blaming which has dominated health policy and planning is still as strong as it ever was and NICE can be viewed as an agent of this approach, masquerading as an objective organisation. If the guidelines are correct then a massive fall in hypertension diagnoses should occur over the next few years. The Politics of Health Group predicts that this will not happen without significant political change and that hypertension will continue to provide a marker for the healthiness of political and economic endeavours.

If you wish to work with the Politics of Health Group on this or any other public health issues please contact Debbie at contact@pohg.org.uk