Introduction
In light of the recent publication of the BASHH ‘Standards for the management of STIs’ BASHH has proposed a communications programme to raise awareness amongst sexual health commissioners and drive local implementation of the standards ahead of the BASHH National Audit Group DH-funded audit against the BASHH STI Management Standards Key Performance Indicators, which will commence late 2010. This document outlines the background and rationale behind the contact programme, and sets out the process and documentation in support of driving the programme forward.

About the Sexual Health standards
The standards cover all aspects of STI management, from diagnosis and treatment to the wider public health role of infection control. There is also a separate publication for people who use STIs services, explaining the quality of care that they are entitled to expect, such as being offered an appointment within 48 hours, and ‘open access’ to services. The nine standards have been drawn up to facilitate the commissioning of services within a clinical network framework to enable and support specialists and healthcare professionals in the community and primary care setting to work together. This is key to ensuring that quality in the management of STIs remains consistent across and between the different types of providers.

Why the standards are important
- There is now increased patient choice and wider availability of testing and treatment for STIs. However, as highlighted in the 2008 review of the sexual health strategy undertaken by MedFASH for the Independent Advisory Group on Sexual Health and HIV, local implementation of the strategy is variable. Many commissioners are turning to a variety of different sexual health providers, who are offering a cheaper service, but may be compromising on quality. These standards ensure that minimum quality is met.
- The standards, include key performance indicators to help commissioners and providers to set measurable performance criteria and monitor outcomes for their services, whether in NHS acute, community or primary care settings, or commissioned from the independent or third sectors.
- With universal implementation, the standards can bring about significant cost savings for the NHS by preventing re-infection, reducing transmission.

How BASHH has been communicating the standards to date
In January, BASHH undertook both Parliamentary and media activity to highlight the launch of the standards. This activity included:
- Parliamentary reception in the House of Lords
- A parliamentary Early Day Motion (EDM) (see Appendix 1) which was signed by over 50 MPs
- Media coverage in over 30 healthcare related journals and online outlets, including specifically: the Health Service Journal, Pulse, GP, BMA News, The Practitioner and Nursing Times and the Pharmaceutical Journal (see Appendix 2 for the news release)
- Finally, an email bulletin was sent to all sexual health commissioners across the country, highlighting the launch of the standards, what the standards include and why they are important for commissioning of STI services (Appendix 3).

Why Commissioners should meet with you
It is vital that clinicians are involved in the commissioning process in order for commissioning to be truly effective and in line with Government World Class objectives. However, a recent Parliamentary inquiry into Commissioning highlighted that clinicians are often not involved enough in the commissioning process which, for complicated disease areas such as in sexual health, is a necessity for effective commissioning. (For more detail on this inquiry please see Appendix 4). The launch of the standards provides a great opportunity to not only increase engagement with local health commissioners and to help build good relations where these aren’t already in place, but to help highlight the importance of implementing the standards to deliver high quality, effective and productive STI services.
With the Coalition government’s focus on standards and outcomes and the BASHH sexual health standards still fairly new, this is a prescient time to carry out the meetings. Clearly, we are expecting further reorganisation in the NHS and commissioning funds to be transferred to GPs, but that reorganisation is likely to take over a year and in all likelihood commissioners from PCTs will move to one of the 600 practice based consortia to be formed.

Supporting documentation: PCT Operating Plans project
In further support of the commissioner contact programme, and to facilitate further discussion between clinicians and sexual health commissioners about how to best meet the sexual health needs in their communities and to get the best from services that are in place, BASHH has undertaken an examination of the sexual health content in the Operating Plans of PCTs. A detailed summary highlights the key themes and findings that arose out of the investigation, and sets out a number of key recommendations for discussions with commissioners based on the findings. Full implementation of the standards is the key aim of the meetings, and we know that in some areas according to the Operating plans, this is starting to take shape; e.g. the Operating Plan for NHS Western Cheshire outlines plans to establish a “Level Three service specification which reflects all the recommendations within the new Genito Urinary Medicine Standards document ‘Standards for the Management of Sexually Transmitted Infections’.”

Logistics
Arranging a meeting
To support your meeting a template email has been drafted which can be emailed to your local sexual health commissioner. The email template can be found in (Appendix 5) Please copy the email and amend accordingly to send to your local sexual health commissioner. If you don’t know the email address of your local commissioner please contact Harriet Smith on behalf of BASHH at bashh@munroforster.com

Meeting Preparation
Re-familiarise yourself with the ‘Standards for the management of STIs’ – the main point of the meeting is to help facilitate the implementation of the standards. In the meeting there will be opportunity to discuss other issues that may be affecting sexual health services in your area. The Operating plans report sets out a number of discussion points and recommendations that you may wish to raise during your meeting.

Debrief
In order for us to track the progress of implementation across the country and keep abreast of sexual health proposals in the Operating plans, please feedback to us at bashh@munroforster.com and, where possible, provide in brief the following information:

- who you had a meeting with
- what was discussed
- what was the outcome

There is also a space on the BASHH webpage where you will be able to share your experiences with other BASHH clinicians through the clinician Contact programme blog.

Importantly, please note, if your commissioners is unable to meet with you, please let us know as this is important information, especially in light of recent findings from the Government inquiry into commissioning.
Appendix 1: EDM

EDM 688 STANDARDS FOR MANAGEMENT OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Sandra Gildey MP

That this House welcomes the new standards for the management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) produced by the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH) and the Medical Foundation for AIDS & Sexual Health (MedFASH); supports their universal implementation across all STI services to ensure consistent and high quality care for the management of STIs; notes that through proper implementation significant cost savings may be realised through the prevention of re-infection and reductions in onward transmission; and congratulates the leading professional groups for endorsing these standards and demonstrating the leadership required to embrace the challenges that are facing the NHS.

http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=40276

Appendix 2: Standards Press Release

21st January 2010

PRESS RELEASE:

Sexual Health providers and commissioners set new challenges in STI care

New standards set to ensure consistency of care and improved quality for service users

The sexual health community has today embraced the challenge of ensuring consistency of care for users of STI services within a tough operating environment, following the launch of new standards, “Standards for the management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)”

The new standards, which are the first of their kind, were produced by the Medical Foundation for AIDS & Sexual Health and the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH). They have been endorsed by the leading professional groups involved in the management of STIs, as well as the Health Protection Agency.

The standards - which are a guide for all providers and commissioners of STI services - cover all aspects of STI management, from diagnosis and treatment to the wider public health role of infection control. Importantly there is also a separate publication for people who use STIs services, explaining the quality of
care that they are entitled to expect, such as being offered an appointment within 48 hours, and ‘open access’ to services (meaning you can use the service without needing to see your GP first).

Dr Immy Ahmed, former president of BASHH and Project Clinical Lead for the standards said:

“Through increased investment and innovations, significant achievements in STI services have been realised in recent years. These new standards represent a consolidation of best practice and the challenge now is for commissioners and STI providers to focus all our efforts on working together and implementing these standards effectively.”

The nine standards have been drawn up to facilitate the commissioning of services within a clinical network framework to enable and support specialists and healthcare professionals in the community and primary care setting to work together. This is key to ensuring that quality in the management of STIs remains consistent across the nation and between the different types of providers.

“There is now increased patient choice and wider availability of testing and treatment for STIs, and the aim is to put patients at the centre of their care. However, as highlighted in the 2008 review of the sexual health strategy undertaken by MedFASH for the Independent Advisory Group on Sexual Health and HIV, local implementation of the strategy is very variable,” explains Ruth Lowbury, Chief Executive of MedFASH.

"The standards, which include key performance indicators, are an important tool for commissioners and providers to set measurable performance criteria and monitor outcomes for their services, whether in NHS acute, community or primary care settings, or commissioned from the independent or third sectors."

The launch of the standards is also timely as it directly follows the 2010/11 NHS Operating Framework, which places quality as the organising principle of the NHS.

Baroness Gould, Chair of the Independent Advisory Group on Sexual Health and HIV commented: “The high rates of sexual ill health in the UK means local leadership is required to ensure STI management is adopted and maintained as a public health priority. These standards, with universal implementation, can bring about significant cost savings for the NHS by preventing re-infection, reducing transmission, and making the very most of the resources available.”

- Ends -

Notes to editors

1. For a copy of Standards for the management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and the Service users’ guide to the Standards please email harriet.smith@munroforster.com
2. MedFASH is a charity dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in the healthcare of people affected by HIV, sexually transmitted infections and related conditions. It has a track record of managing major national projects to inform policy development and provide practical guidance for professionals.

3. BASHH is the lead professional representative body for those managing STIs and HIV in the UK. It seeks to innovate and deliver excellent tailored education and training to healthcare professionals, trainers and trainees in the UK and to determine, monitor and maintain standards of governance in the provision of sexual health and HIV care.


5. The standards cover all aspects of the management of STIs including the diagnosis and treatment of individuals and the broader public health role of infection control. They bring together and contextualise existing guidance as well as addressing relevant issues raised in Progress and Priorities – working together for high quality sexual health. Review of the National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV (MedFASH, 2008) and proposals contained in Lord Darzi’s final report of the NHS Next Stage Review (DH, 2008).

6. The public guide to the standards clearly and succinctly identify what the standards mean for service users, and what people who use services for help and advice on STIs are entitled to expect. The document will be an important for commissioners to engage with members of the public whilst fulfilling essential components of World Class Commissioning.

7. Sexual Health has been a priority since the publication in 2001 of the first ever national sexual health strategy, however despite significant investment, the numbers of annually recorded new cases of STIs have still risen to 399,738 in 2008 from 303,541 in 2001; an increase of nearly 32%. (Health Protection Agency: http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1203348026613)

8. The Medical Foundation for AIDS & Sexual Health (MedFASH) was commissioned by BASHH to manage development of the standards. In order to support this process two groups were established, the Project Working Group (PWG) and the Project Advisory Group (PAG) both with formal invited membership and agreed terms of reference.

9. The Project Working Group (PWG) comprised nominated members of BASHH, the Royal College of Physicians (RCP), the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH), the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB), the Health Protection Agency (HPA) and a PCT sexual health commissioner. The PWG’s remit was to work closely with MedFASH on the content and development of the standards and provide support in managing the project.

10. The Project Advisory Group (PAG) was a larger group of key stakeholders including the Department of Health, relevant professional bodies, the HPA, a third sector service provider and an organisation representing potential service users. The PAG’s remit was to offer stakeholder opinion on the content of the standards and to provide guidance on external consultation and broader project issues including formal endorsement of the published standards.

11. The standards are also recommended for use in services not commissioned by the NHS. While they are written to be applicable to the NHS commissioning system in England, their clinical recommendations on STI management also apply to Wales and Northern Ireland. Sexual health service standards for Scotland were published by NHS Quality Improvement Scotland in 2008.
Appendix 3: Email bulletin to commissioners

Dear [Name],

Last month a number of leading sexual health organisations, policy makers, clinicians and commissioners came together to launch "Standards for the management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)".

The standards - which are guides for all providers and commissioners of STI services - cover all aspects of STI management, from diagnosis and treatment to the wider public health role of infection control.

Importantly, there is also a specific publication for people who use STI services, explaining the services offered, what they are entitled to expect, such as being offered an appointment within 48 hours, and access to services. The public version of the standards is essential to be a vital tool for public and service user engagement.

[Image of person]

Keith Nastatis, President, British Association for Sexual Health and HIV

At ESTIs, we are certain that these standards will not only be critical to tackling the high rates of sexual ill health, through encouraging best practice and effective STI management, but also from an implementation, contributing to significant cost savings through preventing reinfection, reducing transmission and making the very most of the resources available. Our enthusiasm is shared by Public health Minister, Gillian Merron MP.

[BASHH logo]

Gillian Merron MP, Public health Minister welcomes the standards

If you would like to discuss these standards in further detail, or to arrange a meeting with your local BASHH clinician, please contact my colleague, Hannah, at HannahM@BASHH.org.uk or 02078 103802.

Yours sincerely,

Keith Nastatis
President, British Association for Sexual Health and HIV

Click here to view the standards

Standards for the management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Other key facts about the standards:

- The standards were produced by the National Guidelines for STI and Sexual Health and the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH), along with support from the leading professional groups involved in the management of STIs, and the Health Protection Agency.
- Each standard contains recommendations supported by an rationale, outcomes focused indications for commissioning, key performance indicators, references and a list of further relevant supporting documents and guidelines.
- In addition to including the diagnosis and treatment of individuals, the standards review the broader public health role of infection control.
- They are intended for use in all services commissioned by the NHS including those provided by the third and independent sectors.
- The standards complement the forthcoming Sexual Health Commissioning framework and toolkit cover both clinical and commissioning issues and include a framework for monitoring performance.

Why were the standards produced?

Through increasing investment and innovations, significant improvements in STI services have been made in recent years. In addition a new emphasis on sexual health promotion has emerged providing local services which reflect local needs.

These new standards, which represent a consolidation of best practice, will help commissioners maintain momentum in improving services. They will also help commissioners to meet the key challenge of the latest operating framework, to make the necessary investments to achieve quality in the final year of real growth.
In April 2010, the Health Select Committee published a report from their inquiry into commissioning. The report looked at a variety of different issues that are often encountered when commissioning health services and made a number of different observations on the commissioning process. Of particular relevance to the contact programme, the report noted that there are a number of weaknesses in commissioning, through a lack of clinician engagement, lack of data skills and a high staff turnover.

The report highlighted that although PCT’s believe they are ‘doing a good job’ of commissioning, many respondents argued this is far from the reality. It was noted that a lack of clinical knowledge and appropriate training, for commissioners, coupled with weaknesses in quality management, and high staff turnover, is leading to variability in quality of commissioning, and a failure to improve the quality of services.

**Lack of Necessary Skills:** Respondents to the inquiry called for both increased involvement of clinicians in the core day to day commissioning, and for non-clinical PCT staff to obtain more clinical knowledge. It was highlighted that a lack of clinical knowledge lead to situations where commissioners who clearly had little or no knowledge of how services were run, let alone what patients needs were. It was also noted that often PCTs do not have the capacity to deal with clinical specialists, and that this can be compounded when commissioning for complex health areas such as sexual health.

**Shortcomings in data and data analysis:** Two main concerns were highlighted with regards to PCTs’ use of data; firstly whether they make the best use of data they have, and secondly, their failure to obtain the data they lack. Whilst the report recognised that properly interpreted and well managed data should be the backbone of high quality commissioning, a number of submissions reported that PCTs lack the sufficient skills to both interpret and utilise important data that could be used to inform accurate assessments of service need. It was further noted that sexual health commissioning is often not supported by the strong data that is required.

**Staff turnover:** A number of respondents pointed to the high staff turnover of commissioners as a key weakness. Referencing the findings from the MedFASH National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV, the report noted that in 2008, a quarter of sexual health and HIV commissioners had been in their post for less than a year, whilst 11% of posts were vacant.

For further information the full report can be downloaded here:

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmhealth/268/268i.pdf
Email Subject: Meeting with the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV

Dear [insert commissioners name]

As you may know, earlier this year, the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH), together with leading sexual health organisations, policy makers, clinicians and commissioners, launched “Standards for the management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)”.

The standards act as a guide for both providers and commissioners of STI services and they cover all aspects of STI management; from diagnosis and treatment, to the wider public health role of infection control.

Through universal implementation, the standards will be critical to tackling not only the high rates of sexual ill health, but will also contribute to significant cost savings through preventing re-infection, reducing transmission, and making the very most of the resources available.

In order for the standards to have an impact at a local level, it is vital that all sexual health service providers work alongside commissioning teams to ensure that the standards are universally implemented. Therefore, as both a GUM clinician and a member of BASHH, I would very much like to meet with you to discuss the approach that is being taken locally to implement the standards in our area.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further. If you might consider such a meeting in principle please either contact me directly or organise a meeting through BASHH head office by emailing bashh@munroforster.com who will help us find a mutually convenient time and date.

For more information on the standards please click here.

I do look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely

[Insert your name]
[Insert your job title]