Position Statement

2025

The contents of this document are believed to be current. Please continue to refer to the website for in-date versions.

The relationship between JPAC and SaBTO

Introduction

This document provides guidance on the relationship between the Joint UK Blood Transfusion and Tissue Transplantation Services Professional Advisory Committee (JPAC) and the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO). It aims to aid both internal and external stakeholders in understanding their respective roles, interactions, and collaborative processes.

Overview of JPAC and SaBTO

Joint Professional Advisory Committee (JPAC)

JPAC is the professional advisory body that provides scientific and technical advice to the UK Blood Transfusion and Tissue Transplantation Services, reporting to the Medical Directors of the four Services in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It plays a key role in developing and maintaining donor selection guidelines (DSGs), risk assessments and position statements to ensure the safety and efficacy of blood, blood components, tissues and haemopoietic stem cells derived from bone marrow and cord blood. JPAC publishes the Guidelines for the Blood Transfusion and Tissue Transplantation Services in the United Kingdom (known as the Red Book) which provide detailed guidelines for the donation, preparation, and use of blood, tissue, and stem cells for therapeutic and diagnostic purposes under current UK legislation: the Blood Safety and Quality Regulations 2005 and Human Tissue (Quality and Safety for Human Application) Regulations 2007.

Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO)

SaBTO is an independent advisory committee that provides expert advice to the UK Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the health ministries of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the safety of blood, tissues and haemopoietic stem cells. However, unlike JPAC, the remit of SaBTO also extends to organs and gametes. It considers risk assessments, policy implications, health economic assessments and the latest scientific evidence to inform government policy and guidance.

Relationship between JPAC and SaBTO

JPAC and SaBTO operate in complementary roles, ensuring that policies and practices related to blood, tissues and haemopoietic stem cells are evidence-based and aligned with best practices. For many issues, the two committees work collaboratively.

Key areas of interaction

Policy and guidance development

SaBTO advises UK health ministries and Blood Services on policy matters, while JPAC is focused on operational guidelines and standards for Blood Services. However, the interactions between formulating policy and the implications for operational practice may be complex requiring a collaborative relationship. Many of SaBTO's working groups co-opt JPAC members for their specific expertise and to ensure good communication. Recent examples include the Hepatitis E Virus (HEV) working group, microbiological review group, and the Human herpesvirus 8 (HHV-8) working group.

Risk assessments and recommendations

Both committees assess risks related to blood transfusion and tissue transplantation to ensure robust and evidence-based practice. However, the emphasis of their risk assessments is different. For example, JPAC will produce detailed risk assessments on the risk of transmission of infectious disease, including travel history of donors or medical conditions that pose a risk to the recipient. These risks are kept under continuous review and DSGs are reactive and can be changed rapidly. SaBTO's assessments for blood and tissues are usually carried out when more significant or wider changes to policy need to be considered. For example, when the balance between costs and resource for the UK Blood Services and recipient safety requires a full health economic assessment.

The SaBTO remit includes the safety of organs. SaBTO has a standing working group, Donor Organ Risk Assessment (DORA) to assess the risk to organ recipients from infections, cancer and other serious medical conditions and donor behaviours. The acceptance criteria for organs are more permissive than for blood donation so they require separate risk assessment which may vary depending on the urgency of the donation. DORA's membership includes a member of the JPAC Standing Advisory Committee on Transfusion Transmitted Infection (SACTTI) to provide expertise in microbiological safety to ensure best practice.

SaBTO produces the Microbiological Safety Guidelines (MSGs). The MSGs cover the microbiological safety risks for tissue, stem cells, organs and gametes. The guidance for stem cells and tissues in the MSGs are aligned with JPAC guidance. An ad hoc working group is established whenever significant changes to guidance in the MSGs are under consideration. Where changes could impact tissue and stem cells guidance, the working group would include a SACTTI member with relevant expertise.

Surveillance for new or emerging threats

JPAC, through SACTTI, regularly reviews reports of new or emerging infections which may pose a threat to the safe supply of blood and tissues. Where there is a possible threat to organs, this will be brought to the attention of SaBTO. An annual summary of new or emerging threats is prepared by SACTTI for JPAC and is shared with, and presented at, one of the four SaBTO meetings held each year.

SaBTO has direct connections with other independent advisory committees, such as the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP), either through the secretariats, observer status at meetings, or a combination of the two. These connections can provide additional early warnings about new or emerging threats, particularly zoonotic infections, that may pose a threat to the blood supply beyond those evaluated by the usual network of monitoring agencies. Relevant information is shared with JPAC.

Regulation

The Council of Europe, through the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM), issues two guides: the Guide to the Preparation, Use, and Quality Assurance of Blood Components (commonly referred to as the Blood Guide) and the Guide to the Quality and Safety of Tissues and Cells for Human Application (Tissues and Cells Guide). These guides are revised every two years. Some JPAC members are members of the writing groups that revise these guides.

Under current UK legislation, the good practice guidelines (GPGs) within the EDQM guides form the standards against which blood authorities are audited by the competent authority, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). SaBTO and JPAC work collaboratively to produce a 'gap analysis' between each revision of the guides and to consider if action is required by the UK Blood Services or UK health administrations.

Communication

The UK Blood Services fund a full-time post (Scientific Lead for Safety Policy) to work in both the JPAC and SaBTO secretariat teams. This provides a direct link between the two committees to ensure good communication. In addition, the Professional Director of JPAC is an observer at SaBTO meetings.

Reports of SaBTO meetings are prepared for JPAC meetings.

The chair of SaBTO, the Professional Director of JPAC and the two secretariats hold regular informal meetings prior to SaBTO meetings to discuss the SaBTO agenda. These meetings are open to the chairs of the JPAC Standing Advisory Committees to attend to discuss matters of common interest.

Conclusion

The relationship between JPAC and SaBTO is essential for ensuring the highest standards of safety and effectiveness in blood, tissue, and organ-related services in the UK. Their collaboration ensures that scientific and technical expertise informs policy, and that policies are effectively implemented within the UK Blood Services.

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