

THE BASICS OF CLINICAL AUDIT

What is Clinical Audit?

- Clinical Audit is the term used for what is more widely known as quality assurance.
- “In the context of quality assurance, audit can be described as a system of monitoring and checking to establish if quality is being delivered against a set of agreed standards. Clinical audit more specifically describes an evaluation of patient care against defined standards.”

From Bernard Warren: 1998 Developing Practice Through Clinical Audit. 4th Dec Journal of Clinical Effectiveness Vol. 3. No. 4.
- Audit involves looking at where you want to be, determining where you are, and implementing changes to reduce any shortfall.
- Clinical Audit is concerned with improving the quality of medical care.
- “Audit is the process used by health professionals to assess, evaluate and improve the care of patients in a systematic way in order to enhance their health and quality of life.”

From D & S Irvine: 1991: Making Sense of Audit. Radcliffe Medical Press.
- Clinical Audit is not research. Research sets the standards and audit determines whether they are being met.

WHY AUDIT?

- First and foremost it is a **means to improve patient care.**
- Improved patient care usually improves job satisfaction.
- Enhances accountability to those outside the profession
- Helps build team approach.
- Stimulates education.
- Means of defence in a litigious society.
- Can improve efficiency and effectiveness.
- The New NHS 1999 imposes a duty of quality.
Clause 13 reads:

“It is the duty of each PCT, and each NHS trust, to put and keep in place arrangements for the purpose of monitoring and improving the quality of health care which it provides to individuals”
- The government has proposed that “every Doctor should participate in regular systematic medical audit.” (Working for Patients: HMSO 1989)
- The GMC reminds Doctors of their duty to “monitor and improve the quality of healthcare” and to “take part in regular and systematic audit...clinical audit is the hallmark of good professional practice.” (Good Medical Practice: London, GMC, 1995)
- Conducting audit is a criterion for training practices.
- Clinical Governance is the latest government idea aimed at improving quality throughout the NHS. Clinical Audit is a component of Clinical Governance.

There are a number of terms used which can be confusing but which illustrate the way in which audit has evolved within the NHS since its introduction.

Medical Audit - is conducted on a uni-professional basis
Eg. Doctors auditing the number and content of 6 week old baby health checks.

Clinical Audit - is multi-professional audit

Eg. Doctors and Health visitors auditing average age for diagnosis and treatment of congenital deafness.

Interface audit - is conducted across organisational boundaries.

Eg. GP's and Orthopaedic Consultant auditing the time between referral for suspected CDH and first appointment.

Collaborative audit - may be multi-professional and across boundary interfaces.

Patient care is delivered by many different professions from many different organisations. It is a team effort and for this reason much of the literature around encourages collaborative audits.

CULTURE AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- The purpose of audit is positive, ie. To improve patient care.
- In order to thrive it needs a blame free culture.
- Participants must be assured of confidentiality and anonymity or their participation will not be honest and open.

SETTING STANDARDS

Standards are a statement of an agreed minimum level of performance.

STANDARD		
CRITERION	TARGET	EXCEPTIONS

CRITERION → AN ELEMENT OF CARE OR ACTIVITY THAT CAN BE MEASURED

TARGET → THE ACTUAL NUMBER OR COUNT APPLIED TO A CRITERION

EXCEPTIONS → THIS REFERS TO THOSE PATIENTS / ITEMS TO WHOM THE CRITERION DOES NOT APPLY

example

STANDARD - 90% of eligible children should be registered for child health surveillance and receive immunisation at the practice.

CRITERION → ELIGIBLE CHILDREN SHOULD BE REGISTERED FOR CHS AND RECEIVE IMMUNISATION AT THE PRACTICE

TARGET → 90% OF CHILDREN SHOULD MEET THE CRITERION

EXCEPTIONS → IMMUNISATION SHOULD NOT BE GIVEN TO THOSE CHILDREN FOR WHOM THERE ARE CONTRA-INDICATIONS