



Quality & Safety

A column by Maureen Flynn

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CLINICAL AUDIT



THIS month we focus on the 'Practical Guide to Clinical Audit'. The HSE Quality and Patient Safety Directorate developed the guide to equip healthcare professionals with the necessary knowledge to plan, design and conduct a clinical audit. It provides a reference guide for healthcare professionals already involved in clinical audit and a learning resource for those who are new to the process.

What is clinical audit?

Clinical audit is the systematic review and evaluation of current practice against research-based standards with a view to improving clinical care for service users. It is about evaluating practice against a defined 'best practice standard' and making changes if current practice is not in line with best practice.

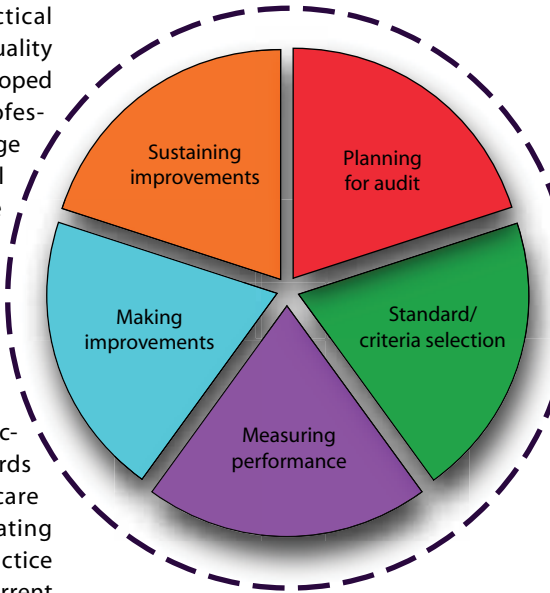
A clinical audit aims to ensure quality – that we are doing the things that we should be. Measuring practice against known standards is not a new idea. During the Crimean War in the 19th century, Florence Nightingale measured, monitored and used her influence to improve hygiene standards in the field hospitals thus leading to an improvement in mortality rates.

Why clinical audit?

Clinical audit facilitates a reliable way of:

- Proactively measuring the effectiveness and performance of healthcare against agreed standards
- Improving the quality of patient care provided by identifying actions to bring practice in line with these standards
- Providing assurances of service quality to patients, clinicians and the health system.

Involvement in clinical audit can expose us to new knowledge and provide evidence of our reflection and commitment to continuing professional development. Clinical audit involving the multidisciplinary



nary team can also assist in improved communications among multidisciplinary team members.

Stages of clinical audit

Clinical audit is a process that is often described as a continuous 'cycle' with stages that must be undertaken to ensure that the audit is systematic and successful. The image used throughout the document aims to illustrate this 'cycling' through the five stages - see figure above.

These stages are planning for audit; standard/criteria selection; measuring performance; making improvements and sustaining improvements. Each stage is broken down into steps providing a practical guide to the methodology of clinical audit.

The clinical audit guide and resource

The practical guide provides direction on carrying out clinical audit for both individuals and clinical teams. It lists current drivers in the Irish health service and describes the five stages approach to clinical audit.

The document discusses the resources required to support clinical audit and the

need to consider ethical and data protection issues. Further resources in the form of sample templates, checklists and summaries are contained in the appendices.

The guide also provides links to more detailed information resources.

Opportunity to get involved

Clinical audit is intended to help you measure the extent to which your day-to-day practice is consistent with best practice. This improves practice if required, with the objective of improving the quality of care and treatment provided.

Why don't you reflect on your area of practice and identify possible audit topics? Clinical audit is most effective when it is carried out as a team activity. Initiate a discussion with colleagues; start small.

The guide can be accessed at www.hse.ie/go/qps or http://hse.ie/eng/about/Who/qualityandpatientsafety/Clinical_Audit/

We welcome feedback on your experience of the clinical audit resources, and about how they might be improved.

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Due to a production error, the HSE's clinical governance document on the 'safety pause' was not published alongside last month's column. It is now available on the page opposite.



About the HSE Quality and Safety Directorate: The Quality and Patient Safety (QPS) Directorate of the Health Service Executive (HSE) was established in January 2011, on the appointment of the National Director, Dr Philip Crowley. The role of the QPS Directorate is to provide leadership and be a driving force by supporting the statutory and voluntary services of the HSE in providing high quality and safe services to patients their families and members of the public.

