

Editorial

CLINICAL AUDITS: THEIR IMPORTANT ROLE FOR CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN RADIOGRAPHY

The Lancet national commission report recommends that the National Department of Health (NDoH) should develop a list of targets measuring quality health outcomes. This list should be expanded over time as new information and evidence become available by investigating these key indicators. This means that they should be evaluated, critiqued and their progress monitored; feedback should be provided on their progress and strategies should be implemented to improve and/or meet the set key indicators.^[1] The policy on quality for healthcare identifies evidence-based practice and innovation as areas needing attention, which can form part of a quality assurance programme, and a continuous quality improvement plan (CQIP) of a healthcare establishment.^[2]

One such CQIP tool that can be considered to improve the quality of service delivery is a clinical audit. This tool entails a process of systematic evaluation of an area of practice against a set of best practice criteria or standards. A clinical audit process requires that an area of concern or focus should be identified. Then the best practice standards and criteria that are to be used to evaluate the area under investigation must be identified and described to highlight the criteria that must be satisfied for each standard. Thereafter the data collection method(s) are selected and data collected. The data are then appraised against the criteria to draw conclusions about the current status of the area being investigated relative to the best practice standards and criteria. Any deviations must also be recorded and possible reasons for this must be indicated in the report. Recommendations from the clinical audit must be implemented.^[3] Examples of practice areas that are frequently evaluated through clinical audits are the quality of patient care and areas of risk for healthcare professionals in the workplace.^[4] Other reasons for conducting clinical audits include continuing professional development, maintaining professional standards and optimising resource use and allocation.^[5] A clinical audit of medical imaging radiographic and radiological procedures and practices, for example, would entail them being reviewed against agreed best practice standards to bring about changes in the workplace to maintain good clinical practices and effective service delivery to patients and other stakeholders.^[6] There is ample literature underscoring the benefits of clinical audits hence they should form part of a quality assurance programme in radiography departments. This means clinical audits should be conducted at predetermined time intervals on a continuous basis.^[3-5] The findings should be shared with all clinicians so that radiography practices can reflect the standards of best clinical practice at all times for the safety and benefit of all involved in imaging and treatment of patients.^[7]

Some articles in this issue of *The South African Radiographer* provide examples of clinical audits which can inform clinical practice. We hope to receive local clinical audits for publication so that others can learn from innovations implemented at other medical imaging departments and practices.

Riaan van de Venter

Co-editor

<https://doi.org/10.54450/saradio.2022.60.1.697>

REFERENCES

1. Rispel LC, Shisana O, Dhai A, Dudley L, English R, Grobler GP, Masilela TC, Patel RH, Puren A, Rensburg R, Stewart J, Whitaker S, Wolvaardt G. Achieving high-quality and accountable universal health coverage in South Africa: a synopsis of the Lancet national commission report. *South African Health Review*. 2019. [cited 2022 April 16]. Available from: https://www.hst.org.za/publications/South%20African%20Health%20Reviews/06%20SAHR_2019_Achieving%20a%20high%20quality%20health%20system.pdf.
2. National Department of Health. A policy on quality in health care for South Africa. 2007. [cited 2022 April 16]. Available from: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/qhc-policy.pdf.
3. Lokuarachchi SK. Clinical Audit - what is it and how to do it? *Galle Med J*. 2006; 11(1):41-43. [cited 2022 April 17]. Available from: <http://doi.org/10.4038/gmj.v11i1.1122>.
4. Quality and patient safety directorate. A practical guide to clinical audit. 2017. [cited 2022 April 16]. Available from: <https://www.kznhealth.gov.za/family/Practical-Guide-Clinical-Audit.pdf>.
5. Bwanga O, Bwalya M. Clinical audit in diagnostic radiography. *Brit J Med & Health Sci*. 2021; 3(10):1168-1172. [cited 2022 April 17]. Available from: <http://www.jmhsci.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/BJMHS450344.pdf>.
6. Schillebeeck J. The need for clinical audits in diagnostic radiology. *HealthManagement.org*. 2017; 17(3):244-246. [cited 2022 April 16]. Available from: <https://healthmanagement.org/c/healthmanagement/issuearticle/the-need-for-clinical-audits-in-diagnostic-radiology#:~:text=Clinical%20audit%20is%20a%20systematic,for%20good%20medical%20radiological%20procedures>.
7. Robins S. Ducks in a row. *Health care reimaged*. Vancouver: Bird Communications; 2022, pp. 146-162.