

Unit Nine

Completing the cycle – evaluation from a general practice employer's perspective

Key messages

Reading this unit will:

- explain the value of performing an evaluation
- describe how evaluations should be structured and what should be included
- describe the different phases of an evaluation.

Your approach should be to set out measurable targets and timescales that are realistic for the particular context and issues that are being evaluated in relation to a health care assistant's (HCA) post. The short-, medium- and long-term outcomes that will be evaluated should be agreed with anyone linked to the initiative in the PCT and practice.¹

Flexibility is important so that the evaluation protocol is not applied too rigidly. It is possible that other factors may crop up that are not under your control. The outcomes that were originally expected if the initiative worked well may, therefore, no longer be viable or possible.

There are two phases to evaluation and these are summarised below.

Formative

A formative evaluation involves collecting data during a development and using it to shape what happens according to problems that arise, in addition to what seems to be working well.

Summative

A summative evaluation occurs after the activity has ended and is used to make judgements about the success, or otherwise, of the development or service being evaluated.

Designing the evaluation

- **Specify exactly what is being evaluated** – set priorities against what you need to achieve, and the time and resources available. Agreement should be obtained from the practice team on the nature and scope of the task.
- **Describe the expected impact of the programme or activity** – it is essential that it is clear who will be affected.
- **Define the success criteria** – these might relate to the structure, process or outcome of a service or development.
- **Identify the information required to demonstrate achievement** – this could be what the individual HCA or the team achieved. The information required might come from observing behaviour, utilising data from existing records and/or prospective recording by the HCAs themselves or by their colleagues involved.

- **Determine a timescale for the evaluation** – this should include how long the evaluation will take overall, what will be done and by what time.
- **Decide who collates the information for the evaluation** – the deadlines for collecting the data should also be decided.
- **Review and refine the objectives of the evaluation** – it is important to check that they are appropriate for the outcomes generated and their impact, as well as the resources expended.

Any evaluation of the HCA role or that of others in the team is complicated by the fact that the outcome may be dependent on many factors other than the initiative being evaluated. It may also take a long period of time before the results are seen.

How to evaluate²

There are many varied approaches to evaluation. The points below provide further information.

1. Evaluate any aspect of an effective service where the HCA plays a role in the practice, for example access, effective delivery, efficiency, patient/carer experience, health outcomes.
2. Evaluate the extent to which the outcome(s) of your practice plan for a new service are achieved.¹
3. Break the cycle of progress with a new initiative or service down into the four RAID stages:³
 - **Review of progress.**
 - **Agree the plan.**
 - **Implement the plan.**
 - **Demonstrate what you have achieved.**

Set goals and milestones as interim measures for one or all of these four stages, and evaluate the extent to which the various planned aspects of the initiative are completed.

4. Undertake regular audits of aspects of the structure, process and outcome of a service or development relating to an HCA post (see [Tool – Structure, process and outcome as the three stages of undertaking audit; then judging how well you have performed](#)). See if you have achieved what you expected when you established the criteria and standards of the audit programme. Check that the full cycle of the audit, including the implementation of changes and the re-audit, have been completed (see [Tool – Employment – evaluation by the practice employer](#)). Think about the impact of your role on the way that HCAs are employed, trained, developed and supported – linking your evaluation to any part of this Toolkit.
5. Measure how effective your practice team infrastructure⁴ is in including the HCA role by evaluating the extent and quality of:
 - *clear team goals and objectives*
 - *accountability and authority*
 - *individual roles for team members*
 - *shared tasks*
 - *regular internal formal and informal communication*
 - *feedback to individual HCAs and other staff*
 - *feedback on team performance* (see [Tool – Teamwork – how well is your team functioning?](#)).

6. Evaluate the aspects of care most highly valued by patients in relation to the HCA(s) or to the rest of the team:
- **availability and accessibility** – including appointments, waiting times, physical access and telephone access
 - **technical competence** – including the knowledge and skills of the HCA, and the effectiveness of the treatment provided
 - **communication skills** – including the ability to provide time, explore patients' needs, listen, explain and give information
 - **interpersonal attributes** – including humaneness, caring attitude, supportiveness and trust
 - **organisation of care** – including continuity of care, coordination of care and availability of on-site services.

What to evaluate

Any, or every, aspect of the strategy and plans for establishing or developing an HCA post in general practice could be evaluated. Below are some ideas for focusing the evaluation – most of them are challenging.

- *Everyone supported and adhered to the action plan to establish or develop HCA posts.*
- *The way that HCA posts were established and developed justified the effort and cost.*
- *There was an emphasis on teamworking and support for the HCA across the team.*
- *The practice culture allowed HCAs to fulfil their potential.*
- *The quality of patient care was improved in key ways.*

Sometimes it is not possible to undertake an evaluation that conforms to best practice. However, the information gathered to review the quality of a service or workforce activity is still worth capturing to give evidence for the need to change and make improvements to the practice's way of working. Box: *A review of general practice nursing activity in one practice* describes one practice's endeavours to review general practice nursing activity by a direct comparison of nursing activity throughout a 3-year period. Such reviews give some information about 'what' has happened, but little information about the 'how' process or the 'outcomes' or benefits to the practice team and patients. To obtain this information, you need to revert to best practice in evaluation and set out objectives, gather information that will address your objectives from all perspectives – probably qualitative and quantitative – and make conclusions about the outcomes upon which you can act using the information gathered earlier.

A review of general practice nursing activity in one practice⁵

Practice nursing activity in one practice was assessed in 2005 and compared with activity levels in 2002. Telephone consultations were excluded in 2005 in line with their similar exclusion in 2002. Staffing levels had changed in the intervening period, with the addition of paid administrative time to support the nurses and an HCA. This occurred as a result of the 2002 review that had identified the potential release of highly skilled nurse time through such delegation. The review made some conclusions about the impact of having employed an HCA in terms of the redistribution of nursing tasks between nursing team members. A more formal evaluation approach where the objectives and expected outcomes of the exercise were explicit would have generated even more useful information for business planning.

To look specifically as a general practice employer of HCAs, you might want to evaluate:

- *your experience of employing HCAs* (see [Tool – Employment – evaluation by the practice employer](#))
- *the support you provide for the education and training of HCAs*
([Tool – Training of health care assistant – evaluation by the practice employer](#))
- *how you treat HCAs as members of the practice team*
(see [Tool – Teamwork – how well is your team functioning](#)).

These three key components of your role and responsibilities are set out as choices for you to select when deciding what aspect you want to evaluate in Table: *Examples of evaluation a general practice employer might undertake*. If there's something more important in your working life, you might decide to evaluate a different topic entirely. In this case, add succinct details to the row at the bottom of the table. With our three examples, you might focus your evaluation on:

- **what actually happened** – *such as the content of the HCA job description and how well it matches the post; the content of their personal development plan (PDP); their inclusion in team meetings*
- **how it worked out** – *how well the appointment process went or the fairness of employment practices; the type of help HCAs receive in developing their PDP and the opportunities for associated learning; the effectiveness of team communications and the extent to which HCAs are included*
- **the outcome** – *what was achieved as a result of the HCA's induction or appraisal; how well the HCAs apply their knowledge and skills as a result of completing their PDP or team-based learning; the changes in the way care is delivered as a result of practice teamworking, including the contribution that HCAs make.*

You might evaluate the 'what', 'how' and 'outcome' aspects regarding your employment practice, training of HCAs, inclusion of HCAs in practice teamworking or some other aspect of practice work that is important. Alternatively, you may evaluate just one of these, such as the 'how'. Evaluating the outcome and what you achieved or the changes made to the service you provide to patients as a result will be more challenging to evaluate than the 'what' and the 'how' aspects.

Undertaking the evaluation

1. Look at the table overleaf and decide by reading the information in columns A, B and C if this is something you would like to evaluate.
2. Click on the tool for instructions on how to complete the evaluation, for example if you choose 'Employment', click on [Tool – Employment – evaluation by the practice employer](#).
3. This Tool will give you a template to fill in electronically or by hand to complete the evaluation process.

Examples of evaluation a general practice employer might undertake

Aspect of HCA post	Criteria for evaluation by general practice employer of HCA role		
	What is it about? Extent by which:	How did it work? Extent by which:	What was the outcome? Extent by which:
Employment <i>Tool – Employment – evaluation by the practice employer</i>	Job description covers HCA role and special areas, eg self care.	Annual appraisal is undertaken to agreed quality standard.	HCA is retained in practice/NHS (as HCA or progressing on career pathway).
Training <i>Tool – Training needs assessment of health care assistant(s) – evaluation by the practice employer</i>	Training needs template or system of identification exists.	Training needs identified; relevant courses undertaken.	Qualifications gained; learning applied in enhanced role.
Teamwork/integration <i>Tool – Teamwork – how well is your team functioning</i>	Various protocols for teamworking and learning exist in general practice.	Audits are undertaken to show that teamworking protocols are being applied; patient satisfaction with team roles is demonstrated; 360° feedback survey by practice team is undertaken and includes HCA – based on Knowledge and Skills Framework dimensions.	Role of HCA contributes to increased QOF points; up-skilled HCA provides aspect of new service or performs new tasks by delegation.
Your selected issue	You add	You add	You add

Summary

- *General practices should take the opportunity to evaluate the impact of the HCA role in their practice.*
- *There are two phases to any evaluation, formative and summative.*
- *Any aspect of the HCA's role or the introduction of the role can be evaluated through a structured process.*

References

1. Pawson R, Tilley N. *Realistic Evaluation*. London: Sage; 2000.
2. Chambers R, Wakley G. *Making Clinical Governance Work For You*. Oxford: Radcliffe Medical Press; 2000.
3. Wood L. *Review, Agree, Implement, Demonstrate*. Leicester: National Clinical Governance Support Team; 2001.
4. Hart E, Fletcher J. Learning how to change: a selective analysis of literature and experience of how teams learn and organisations change. *J Interprof Care* 1999; 13(1): 53–63.
5. Woodlands General Practice Team. *Nursing Project 2005*. Kent: Woodlands Health Centre; 2005 (unpublished, practice report).