

Unit Eight

Quality improvement from the health care assistant's perspective

Key messages

Reading this unit will:

- explain the importance of systems to improve clinical quality
- explain how the health care assistant (HCA) can help to improve the quality of care that patients receive.

Clinical governance places the responsibility for quality on both the individual and the organisation. Good-quality patient care is the responsibility of all the members of the general practice team. HCAs frequently perform their duties under clinical supervision and their contribution to that activity is part of providing quality care (see Box: *Improving quality services*).

Example: Improving quality services

Jane was practising her new skill of spirometry under the supervision of Laura, the practice nurse who had received special training in chronic respiratory diseases. Mr Jones had just been unpleasant to Laura by complaining that she did not know what she was doing. He said that he had had all these tests done 2 months ago at the hospital clinic.

Laura was embarrassed and defensive after he left. Jane told Laura that she lived in the same area of town as Mr Jones and that he had been like that since his son had been killed in a car accident. Laura looked less defensive and said it was understandable that he was so angry. She wondered aloud why Mr Jones' respiratory tests were not on the patient record; she would not have called him for review had she known he had been seen so recently. They looked together at the hospital reports and found the information in a letter. However, none of the results had been entered in the computer record.

After discussion, it was decided that Jane would go through the list of people to be recalled each month and check them against the letters from the hospital. She would enter any unrecorded results and keep count as an audit to find out if this was a one-off event or part of a significant failure. They each felt that this had been a productive and useful encounter with Mr Jones, and recorded the event in their learning logs.

You might use the seven pillars of clinical governance (see [Unit 8: Quality improvement](#)) to record information that would contribute to your learning log and the information required for your personal development plan (PDP).

Risk management

The implementation of clinical risk management requires staff to be trained in the recognition and minimisation of clinical risk. It can be useful to complete a skills-based assessment tool to ensure basic competences in infection control, and health and safety, see [Tool – Competence assessment – obtain venous blood samples](#). The induction programme for a new HCA should include training for child protection awareness (see Box: *Maintaining awareness*).

Example: Maintaining awareness

Crystal had been concerned by Mr Hardley's attitude towards his two children (both under school age). He had attended the clinic for a review of his asthma and his two sons had sat absolutely still together on one chair, watching their father all the time with large eyes. The children appeared grubby and uncared for, and Mr Hardley had shouted at the younger child when he had fallen when getting down from the chair.

Crystal spoke to her practice nurse supervisor about her concerns and was encouraged to discuss them with the health visitor. The health visitor was able to tell Crystal that Mr Hardley's wife had left him, and he was receiving help and supervision from social services. The health visitor recorded Crystal's comments in her records and said she would pop in to see them that week to see how things were going. Crystal recorded the events in her learning log.

All HCAs should contribute towards any significant event analysis (see Box: *Identifying adverse events*).

Example: Identifying adverse events

Rona dressed Mrs Davies' knee where she had grazed it falling over the edge of the doormat on her way into the surgery. She heard how Mrs Davies had not seen the mat with her new glasses: 'Varifocal, they are, dear. More like dizzifocal, if you ask me.' She checked Mrs Davies' blood pressure and reassured her it was fine. Later, Rona filled in a report of what she had seen and done for the practice manager's report on this adverse event. This was added to the other information gathered before discussion of whether anything needed be done about the doormat.

Clinical effectiveness

You might record what protocols you follow for your work that are specifically for your guidance. If you have already been working from these protocols for some time, you could establish how and how often they are reviewed and the evidence base for the protocols.

Education, training and continuing professional development

Appropriate education and training underpins much of clinical governance. You should be able to demonstrate commitment and support to education, training and competence in their learning records.

Record how much time you have for clinical supervision and protected learning time. You should also be able to demonstrate your formal or informal learning in your learning log and reflective diary (see [Unit 4: Personal and professional development of health care assistants](#)). The PDP should include your comments about the effectiveness of the learning you have received to date and contain plans for future learning. Once the review of your PDP is complete, you will need to review it regularly to see how well the review matches with what actually happens and what, if anything, needs to be done to address any further learning needs.

Use of information

HCA should record in their PDP any issues they have with the computer system they are using as this represents a learning need. It is particularly important that they are using the correct Read codes for illnesses and procedures so that information entered can be retrieved accurately. The HCA also needs to assess their input into patient care plans to ensure they are sufficiently tailored to the individual. The learning log should also include how the HCA uses the computerised alert systems and protocols.

Staffing and staff management

You could use your reflective diary to record any comments about difficulties in team working that you have encountered and your thoughts about how improvements could be introduced. These could be discussed with your line when appropriate (see [Unit 7: Integration of health care assistants in the general practice workforce](#)). There may be some instances where you will have to take action that you find uncomfortable in order to improve working practices (see Box: *Maintaining standards*).

Example: Maintaining standards

Mary had asked Mr Kelly to provide her with a urine sample. He had said, quite firmly, 'No, I'll do it at home and bring it back', adding, 'I'm not doing it in that toilet here'. Mary had previously been a cleaner at the surgery before she did her HCA training and was upset to hear Mr Kelly's comments. During her lunch break when no patients were about, she went into the male patients' toilet and was struck immediately by the smell and general grubbiness. In the afternoon, she sought out the practice manager and they went together to look at the state of the toilet. The practice manager said grimly that he would speak to the new cleaners and Mary felt a bit guilty, but recognised that this was a quality issue affecting not only health and safety, but also the reputation of the practice.

Clinical audit

The HCA should record in their learning log the audits with which they are involved. It is important to include information about what changes were needed, how they were implemented and what repeat auditing showed. [Unit 9: Completing the cycle – evaluation](#) gives further information on audit and evaluation (See [Tool – Structure, process and outcome as the three stages of undertaking audit; then judging how well you have performed](#)).

The *Essence of Care*¹ benchmarking (See [Tool – Essence of Care benchmarking](#)) and the part that the HCA plays in recording observations are also an essential part of the HCAs role.

Patient and public involvement

The role of patient and public involvement is clearly indicated within *The NHS Plan*.² The intention is to both involve and consult patients and the general public about key issues within the NHS, such as identifying local needs and priorities, and evaluating the quality of services from a patient satisfaction viewpoint.^{3,4} It can be useful for you to record any comments or feedback from patients in your reflective diary (See *Unit 4: Personal and professional development of health care assistants*).

The practice will conduct a patient satisfaction survey each year. You should record the feedback from the survey as it applies to you and your teamworking and indicate whether there are any quality improvements to which you can contribute.

Tool – Patient experience of care provided by a health care assistant – evaluation by a patient gives an example of how you can evaluate patients' experience of the care they have received from you.

Summary

- *Clinical governance is a system to ensure that health services are safe and of a high quality.*
- *HCA's can help practices to improve the quality of the care that they provide by being actively involved in clinical governance.*
- *HCA's should have a good understanding of how the practice handles quality improvement and what role they are expected to play.*
- *Staying up to date helps HCA's to improve their knowledge and the care that they provide.*

References

1. Modernisation Agency. *Essence of Care Toolkit*. London: Department of Health; 2003. <http://www.modern.nhs.uk/home/key/docs/Essence%20of%20Care.pdf>. Available at: http://www.cgsupport.nhs.uk/PDFs/articles/Essence_of_Care_2003.pdf.
2. Department of Health. *The NHS Plan*. London: Stationery Office; 2000. <http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/05/57/83/04055783.pdf>.
3. Prodigy Guidance. *Chapter Three: Concepts Clinical Guidance*. London: Department of Health: <http://www.prodigy.nhs.uk/training/eClinicalGovernance/chapter3.asp>.
4. Scottish Executive. *Learning Together – Chapter Three: Building a Learning Organisation*. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/learningtogether/leto-04.htm>.