

Quality improvement activities

Practices need to engage in quality improvement activities to improve quality and safety for patients in areas such as practice structures, systems and clinical care. It is important that decisions to implement change are based on practice data.

RACGP 4th Edition Standards

3.1.1 *Our practice participates in quality improvement activities.*

Assessment methods

- Interview with GPs, clinical and administrative staff

Surveyors will interview GPs, clinical and administrative staff, who should be able to describe aspects of the practice that have been improved in the past three years. Staff should be able to describe how patient population data, or practice specific data, is used to make improvements.

- Documentation review

Where a documented practice population data report exists, following a clinical audit being undertaken to highlight specific patient subgroups, the reporting system used and subsequent improvement activities initiated should be available for surveyors to review on the day of the survey visit. In addition, any documentation referring to continuous improvement activities, such as internal assessment reports, should be made available also.

Meeting the Standards

Quality improvement is a team activity. Achieving improvements requires the collaborative effort of the practice team and all members of the team should feel empowered to contribute. All staff should be able to describe recent improvements to the practice. It could be something small and simple, or it might be a complete overhaul of practice systems. Examples include: upgrading computer systems, purchasing new equipment, improving a process after a near miss was identified, or improving the appointment schedule on receipt of patient feedback. Clinical staff, in particular, should understand how practice data is used for ongoing quality improvement. An example might be recognising your practice has a large number of smokers and then introducing a quit smoking campaign to improve patient health outcomes overall. Each practice will have different results after completing applicable audits and reviewing its own data, but it's what practices do with the information they collect that is important.

Best practice

It is recommended that practices undertake regular quality improvement processes, such as a PDSA cycle, which is a plan-do-study-act cycle. This is where the practice plans to improve or change a specific process, then implements the change, (the doing). Once the process has been tested, it's important to then review or observe the process and learn from any consequences, (the study), and finally determine if any further modifications should be acted upon. Ideally, the practice's policies and procedures manual will outline quality improvement activities and quality improvement processes. It is beneficial to discuss quality improvements in staff and/or clinical meetings. Lastly, keep in mind that accreditation is one of the most effective quality improvement activities available to general practices.