

Clinical governance: Clinical Excellence

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Clinical governance has been defined as 'A framework through which NHS organisations are accountable for continuously improving the quality of their services and safeguarding high standards of care by creating an environment in which excellence in clinical care will flourish'.¹

What is it?

Clinical governance is a term used to describe the way in which healthcare organisations and their employees ensure that they deliver high quality healthcare. Some have described it as an umbrella term for everything that helps to maintain and improve high standards in patient care. In other words, clinical governance aims to ensure that all healthcare professionals have access to education and training, skills and competencies to deliver the care needed by our patients.

In dentistry, clinical governance is part of our day-to-day working lives. The overall NHS clinical governance framework is based on the 24 core standards, grouped into seven domains, detailed in *Standards for Better Health*.² In 2006, they were revised into the 12 core standards for dentistry set out by the Department of Health (DH) in the *Primary Care Dental Services Clinical Governance Framework*.³ The second set incorporates the standards set out in the first set. However, many Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), including the ones where we have been working, prefer to

use the overall set of 24 core standards for all healthcare workers, including the dental team, and in this article we refer throughout to these original 24 core standards and not to the second set of 12. The chances are that you are already working to some (if not all) of these core standards, and whichever set you use, the outcome should be the same.

Core Standard 8 (CS8) of *Standards for Better Health* concerns giving appropriate support to dental staff, and CS11 concerns



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recruitment and training. Embedded within these standards are elements such as implementing formal appraisals and personal development plans (PDPs). Continuing professional development (CPD) goes hand in hand with this concept, and registered DCPs, as well as dental practitioners, are expected to meet their CPD requirements.

How do we start?

NHS healthcare professionals need to demonstrate their compliance through documented written evidence which reflects their working practice. For some it may mean completing a comprehensive

portfolio of evidence; for others it may mean embarking on a lifelong learning programme with written evidence such as CPD logs and personal development plans, which dovetail into a main clinical governance programme. In essence, by following a recognised clinical governance programme, dental practitioners and DCPs can work towards improving upon their working practices year upon year.

Clinical governance programmes can help with ideas for implementing mechanisms and techniques to anticipate potential problems. By electing to follow one of the recognised clinical governance packages you will be guided through the maze of mandatory requirements, and compliance will soon be at your fingertips. The process can be made much easier and more effective by involving the whole dental team.



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There are a number of programmes available which can provide help and guidance to achieve compliance, such as the BDA's Clinical Governance Toolkit and Good Practice Scheme, the Smile-on Clinical Governance Scheme (published in association with the Postgraduate Deanery

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for Kent, Surrey and Sussex), and the FGDP(UK)'s Key Skills in Primary Dental Care assessment.

What standards?

All 24 core standards (except for core standard 15, which is not usually relevant to dentistry) need to be achieved, and the Smile-on scheme is accompanied by a CD-ROM, which explains each of the 24 core standards and gives a summary of suggested types of evidence. In the programme, the core standards have been divided across seven domains, which are:

- Safety
- Clinical and cost-effectiveness
- Governance
- Patient focus
- Accessible and responsive care
- Care environment and amenities
- Public health.

During the course of visiting the practices currently undergoing the programme, we have concluded that those practices which involve the whole team appear to have an advantage with regards to a successful clinical governance programme. Knowledge is power, and can promote a thirst for responsibility for many DCPs; this in turn can lead to an improved standard of patient care. We have seen that patients feel the benefit of being cared for by a team which shares key knowledge and works together to create an environment where clinical excellence will flourish.

Who can help us?

As dental education facilitators for the Kent, Surrey and Sussex (KSS) Postgraduate Dental Deanery, we have witnessed first-hand how these core standards have impacted on general dental practice and the dental team. In some instances practices have embraced the programme in its fullest sense, such as by allocating

protected time to ensure that key evidence is generated, shared and understood by everyone. Many have also developed individual portfolios for team members, including evidence such as CPD logs, personal development plans, signed practice policies and protocols, appraisals, and contracts. Holding team meetings more often and viewing the *Key Skills* discs has been another useful development, and in many cases has inspired one team member to spearhead the programme within their practice.

Initially we started with a pilot project, and subsequently the programme has been embraced by the Brighton and Hove City PCT. In both instances, the programme started with an invitation to all practitioners to attend an introductory seminar at a number of postgraduate centres across Kent, Surrey and Sussex. Initially, at these seminars all attendees were asked to

out to all attendees of these sessions, which included a clinical governance pack and accompanying CD, together with a set of the FGDP(UK)'s *Key Skills in Primary Dental Care* CDs, Denplan's *Clinical Audit Made Simple II* package, and Dental Protection's 36 risk management modules. It was also explained that a dental education facilitator (DEF) would be available to offer help, support and guidance in person by way of a visit to the practice if required. Effectively, DEFs act as a key link between the PCT and the practitioner.

What happens next?

Following these introductory seminars, we contacted the practices involved and, if they required our help, agreed a visit date. It is encouraging to note that some practices in the PCT were managing very well already, and felt that a visit from us would be superfluous to their needs.



complete a baseline knowledge assessment questionnaire. This was carried out anonymously, as each questionnaire was numbered and not named. The questionnaire will be the method by which the change effected by this clinical governance programme can be evaluated and measured.

There were a number of resources given

Visits have been both interesting and rewarding, though we've never seen so many parking meters and officious-looking traffic wardens as we have in recent months, especially in Brighton and Hastings! The teams and patients we have met in the practices we have visited to date have shown us a huge range of characters and personalities, and it certainly

Looking for the CPD quiz?

In July 2007, the *Team in Practice* CPD quiz was launched online, and following the huge success of this venture, the quiz is now available to complete via the FGDP(UK) website. All members of the FGDP(UK) may complete the quiz online to receive their CPD hours.

Simply visit www.fgdp.org.uk/members to log into the Members' Area using your Athens username and password. On completion of the quiz, you will immediately be sent an electronic certificate for three hours of verifiable CPD, which can be added to your CPD portfolio in advance of the requirements by the General Dental Council for verifiable continuing education by registered DCPs. (Please note: CPD is not available to non-member subscribers).

If you have forgotten your Athens username and/or password, please contact the Membership Officer at wmckinnon@rcseng.ac.uk or on 020 7869 6767. For any other queries about the CPD quiz, please contact Dave O'Malley at domalley@rcseng.ac.uk or on 020 7869 6771.

makes your job worthwhile when you are on the receiving end of a genuine 'thank you' by way of a letter or email (or even, in some instances, a hug!).

After stepping over the threshold and making introductions, it was down to business.

As DEFs it is our role to assess both the clinical governance and Key Skills programmes within the practice. Had they been started? Or were they still on the back burner?

As the project is being externally validated by the University of Kent, we used standardised assessments to establish the level of evidence within each practice. The Deanery seeks to provide education and training for the whole dental team, and our discussions can go into some considerable depth, especially when planning for lifelong learning requirements. As Facilitators we can provide knowledge and information regarding courses for DCPs as this is another strand to our role.

Once an assessment of evidence had been completed, any other queries or concerns were discussed. It was sometimes necessary to demonstrate the CDs on our laptops. This proved to be of benefit to a great many clinical governance leads as it enabled them to cascade this information quickly and efficiently to the rest of their team. At times during the first assessment visit, there have been areas where the clinical governance lead needed some



direction, and we were able to supply the appropriate nuggets of information on the spot. DEFs are regularly entrusted with a lot of confidential information, and we emphasise at each visit that all matters discussed during a visit are strictly confidential. A report of the visit is sent to the practice.

Getting the act together

Involving the whole team in clinical governance helps to promote an 'open-door' approach to working together. Delegating some of the tasks to other members of the team can be a wise move, as it will help to give the team member a sense of ownership for the work, which will in turn mean higher standards for the team, and for the patient. Communication is the key to good relationships, and in formal appraisals or informal team meetings, it can help to build support networks and provide opportunities for new ideas. Good communication also helps to foster a sense

of trust, and provides space for individuals to disagree and express their opinions as well as celebrating the team's successes. It also provides a framework upon which poor performance can be tackled, allowing mistakes to be analysed and evaluated, rather than covered up.

Developing clinical governance policies and systems most definitely requires enthusiastic involvement of the whole team. Using the *Key Skills* CDs at team meetings can help to promote discussion amongst an otherwise quiet team, and fire up that enthusiasm that is lying just beneath the surface.

Our programme at the KSS Postgraduate Dental Deanery is still ongoing, and as dental education facilitators we continue to promote good partnerships between deaneries, PCTs and organisations such as the FGDP(UK), which in turn help to inspire excellence in clinical standards.

References

1. Department of Health. *A first class service: Quality in the new NHS*. DH: London; 1998. Available via www.dh.gov.uk as of March 2008.
2. Department of Health. *Primary Care Dental Services Clinical Governance Framework*. DH: London; 2006. Available via www.primarycarecontracting.nhs.uk as of March 2008.
3. Department of Health. *Standards for Better Health*. DH: London; 2004. Available via www.dh.gov.uk as of March 2008.

FGDP(UK) cross-references

Standards in Dentistry
4.2.2 – Clinical Governance

Key Skills
All Key Skills

