

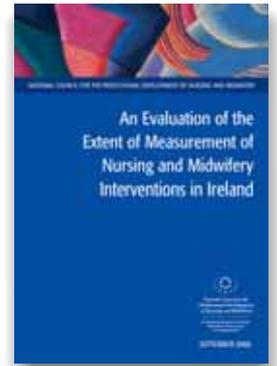
# Update 3

National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery

DECEMBER 2009

## Using Audit to Measure and Sustain Quality in a Mental Health Service

In its study *An Evaluation of the Extent of Measurement of Nursing and Midwifery Interventions in Ireland* (National Council 2006) the National Council found that nurses and midwives were participating in hospital- and organisation-wide quality improvement and assurance schemes in a wide variety of care settings. Nurses and midwives participating in the study's focus groups reported that they either used or were familiar with standards and systems (e.g., ISO 9000 and QUASAR), and that areas typically audited included admission and discharge rates, falls prevention and visiting hours. Training in the use of audit was seen as contributing to the successful implementation of audit and other quality improvement and assurance systems, as was a supportive culture within the healthcare environment. More recently, the Commission on Patient Safety and Quality Assurance (2008) has argued that clinical audit is the single most important method which any healthcare organisation can use to understand and ensure the quality of service that it provides.



### Using Clinical Audit in Mental Health Nursing

Clinical audit refers to the systematic and critical review of systems and processes of care, allowing comparison of performance against evidence-based standards, for example, compliance with National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines. Integrated with clinical risk

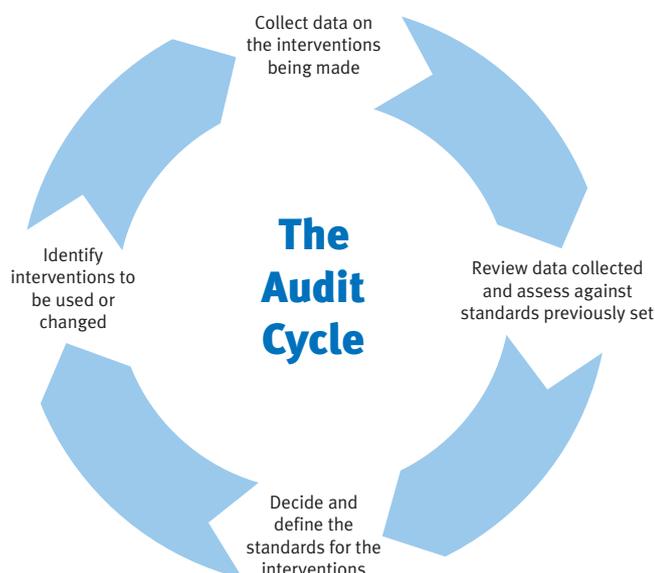
management, continuing practice and professional development, and research and development, clinical audit contributes to, and is informed by, evidence-based practice and continuous quality improvement (McSherry and Pearse 2007) (see Figure 1).

The quality agenda in psychiatric hospitals in Ireland is informed by national legislation, regulatory bodies, international best practice and the Mental Health Commission (MHC). St John of God Hospital Ltd, Stillorgan, Co Dublin is an independent psychiatric service and is registered as an approved centre in accordance with the *Mental Health Act, 2001*. The hospital provides acute in-patient care within its eight suites and a range of specialised psychiatric services. It has taken a proactive approach to quality assurance and continuous quality improvement, involving the establishment of a clinical governance committee and hospital-wide multidisciplinary participation in the voluntary CHKS (Caspé Healthcare Knowledge Systems) accreditation process. In addition, the Child and Adolescent Unit is audited by the Quality Network for In-patient Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (QNIC).

In the role of nursing practice development manager, Peter Donnelly has been closely involved in the service's multidisciplinary quality improvement programme since 2005. He was charged with ensuring that the nursing contribution to patient care and outcomes was visible and clearly defined. His priorities were to:

- review nursing care, treatment plans and documentation with a view to integrating them within the multidisciplinary clinical record, enhancing clinical documentation and

Figure 1. The Audit Cycle Approach



facilitating the move towards an implementation of a "paper-light" electronic health record system;

- monitor the provision of nursing care in order to assess the extent to which it complied with standards and hospital policies; and
- promote improvement and compliance with new standards and policies as these came into force.

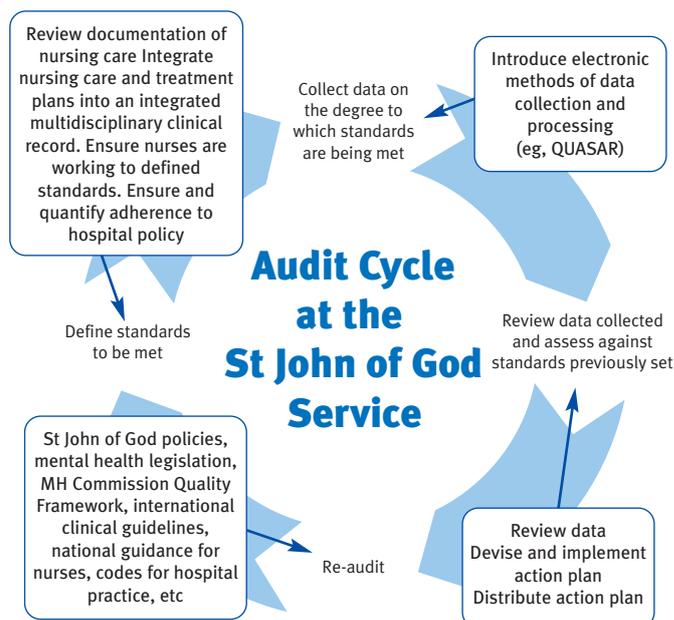
Audit was seen as a vital tool in the review process. In order to ensure effective implementation of audit processes, he had to develop a training programme for himself and a cohort of nurses who would be implementing audit in their practice. He targeted the director of nursing, senior nurse managers and clinical nurse specialists as audit was deemed to be an inherent component of their respective roles. Having obtained funding from the National Council through its continuing education funding programme, Peter put his plans into action. QUASAR (Quality Assurance, Survey and Report) software, licence and training was purchased and provided to the target group. Immediately after completing their training, the target group were required to complete and report on an audit of a specified aspect of nursing within a specified time-frame.

This nurse-led and nurse-driven initiative provided strong evidence of the high standards of nursing practice in place throughout the hospital but also highlighted areas needing improvement. The establishment of a multidisciplinary audit committee, under the auspices of the hospital's clinical governance committee, and the beginning of a service-wide audit project were informed in part by the learning accrued and imparted by the nurse-led audit initiative. The nursing priorities of the multidisciplinary audit project were to:

- integrate the existing nursing treatment plan into a single multidisciplinary record;
- continue to audit standards of nursing care provision with reference to nursing models, service policies and clinical guidelines; and
- enhance the clinical audit process across the entire hospital.

Peter provided further training to the senior and clinical nurse managers in collecting data electronically using QUASAR. Using this software programme facilitated the production of a report on the rates of compliance, sub-optimal compliance and non-compliance with the specified standards across the whole hospital and by individual suites. These results were then made available to each suite manager and used to develop appropriate actions plans (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Implementing the Audit Cycle at the St John of God Service**



Setting and measuring standards has enhanced the quality assurance process within St John of God Hospital. Having conclusive data has enabled the exchange of meaningful information on compliance rates to staff, heads of departments and the accrediting body. Achievements and good practice have been substantiated and areas needing improvement have been identified. As with any change in practice, the introduction of audit was challenging both for Peter and the front-line nursing staff. He was able to draw upon electronic and paper-based documents and templates but benefited most from networking with members of the Irish Nursing and Midwifery Practice Development Association and people with the relevant expertise in other locations. Audit has become an increasingly multidisciplinary endeavour, bringing with it added organisational and operational difficulties, but the use of paper and electronic data collection tools expedited the compilation of data and reports. In addition, close collaboration with the audit committee has led to a more streamlined auditing process and framework. Each department now submits a detailed audit proposal and a full audit report to this committee, both of which are then uploaded to the hospital intranet, thereby ensuring transparency and accessibility as well as enhancing quality awareness among all staff at the St John of God Hospital.

## References

- Commission on Patient Safety and Quality Assurance (2008) *Building a Culture of Patient Safety*. Department of Health and Children, Dublin
- R McSherry and P Pearse (2007) *Clinical Governance: A Guide to Implementation for Healthcare Professionals* (2nd ed). Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
- Mental Health Commission (2007) *Quality Framework: Mental Health Services in Ireland*. Mental Health Commission, Dublin.

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National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery

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