



POSITION STATEMENT ON CLINICAL AUDITS

Purpose

All registered radiographers in South Africa must adhere to relevant legislation and core standard documents that apply to provision of service to patients. In view of these documents, which are listed under recommended reading, the Society of Radiographers of South Africa (SORSA) promotes the availability of adequate and reliable radiography services in the Republic of South Africa. It is important that radiographers continuously audit their quality of service to patients and strive for maintenance and improvement in technical and ethical standards both in practice and in training. Radiographers in all four categories (i.e., diagnostic, ultrasound, radiotherapy and nuclear medicine) play an important role in the provision of services in South Africa. Radiographers thus should constantly strive to improve their standards of care using, participating in, and conducting clinical audits to ensure that patient outcome standards are achieved.

Definition

Clinical audit is a quality improvement process that measures current patient care and outcomes against agreed standards of best practice.

Overview of clinical audits

A clinical audit is a tool for quality improvement. The audit process assists in establishing whether the right thing is done and in the correct manner. The final goal of an audit is to find areas of improvement. During a clinical audit, relevant data, documents and resources are used to assess or examine the performance of the department against agreed practice standards. A clinical audit could be comprehensive or focused. A comprehensive clinical audit assesses or examines the holistic activities of the department. A focused clinical audit could be performed to assess or examine specific performance standards, such as patient care, good clinical practices, service delivery, customer satisfaction, information management, errors, patient experiences, infection control, and patient safety.

Processes involved in each of the clinical audit cycle phases

1. Planning of the audit: part of the QA procedures

- Select: comprehensive or focused audit
- Agree on standards of best practice captured in the quality assurance manual

2. Audit process

- Pilot, data and evidence collection
- Site visit
- Analysis and reporting

3. Audit report

- Make recommendations
- Draw up an action plan to implement change(s)
- Schedule a re-audit (if needed)

Clinical audit versus research

A clinical audit is performed to improve quality of services for an identified topic. It should not be viewed as a judgemental or punitive measure. Patient and staff confidentiality must be adhered to in accordance with biomedical ethics. An audit does not require ethics approval whereas research may require such approval. Research is done to contribute to a body of knowledge. Clinical research and clinical audits share a common goal, namely, to improve healthcare services to the public. There are some overlaps as both involve retrospective or prospective collection of data.

Clinical audit protocols

There are a range of protocols in the public domain (see recommended reading). The purpose of a clinical audit is to produce a report. An example of a report template is presented.

Clinical audit title	
Date	
Names: lead team member and co-team members	
Name of department	
Rationale of the audit: background/reason for the topic	
Aims and objectives: criteria and standards	
Methodology and sample size	
Findings/results	
Recommendations	
Commendations	
Areas for improvement: action plan as to what requires	

improvements as per best practice standards; who will be responsible for overseeing the areas for improvement	
Re-audit: date and time-frame	

Recommended reading

- Legislation and core standards
 - Bill of Rights, Chapter 2 in The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996
 - National Health Act 61, 2003
 - The Health Professions Act 56 of 1974
 - HPCSA 2021 booklets: 1,3,4,5, 9 and 12
 - National core standards for health establishments in South Africa, National Department of Health, 2011
 - A guideline for clinical audit in public health facilities, Department of Health October 2016
 - Public Health Amendment Act 42 of 1971. South Africa
 - SAHPRA. Guidelines on request for medical x-ray examinations. September 2022.
- Clinical audit publications
 - An introduction to clinical audit for radiographers. ISRRT. Available from: <https://www.elearning.isrrt.org/mod/book/view.php?id=349>
 - Atomic Energy Agency; 2010. Available from: https://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/Publications/PDF/Pub1425_web.pdf.
 - Audit site called AuditLive, a collection of audit templates providing a framework identifying best practice in key stages of the audit cycle. <https://www.rcr.ac.uk/career-development/audit-quality-improvement/auditlive-radiology/>
 - Audit and quality improvement. <https://www.rcr.ac.uk/career-development/audit-quality-improvement/>
 - Audit and QI publications. <https://www.rcr.ac.uk/career-development/audit-quality-improvement/audit-qi-publications/>
 - Comprehensive clinical audits of diagnostic radiology practices: a tool for quality improvement. Quality assurance audit for diagnostic radiology improvement and learning (QUAADRIL). IAEA Human Health Series no 4. Vienna: International
 - Dilnawaz M, Mazhar H, Shaikh ZI. Clinical audit: a simplified approach. J of Pakistan Ass of Dermatol. 2012; 22 (4):358-362.
 - ISRRT position statement. The implementation and use of clinical audit in medical imaging by radiographers/radiological technologists. August 2021. https://www.isrrt.org/pdf/PS_Clinical_Audit_Council_approved_August_2021.pdf
 - Moutlana HJ. Conducting an audit of clinical service. South Afr J Anaesth Analg 2022; 28(5) Supplement <http://www.sajaa.co.za>
 - Quality management audits in nuclear medicine practices. IAEA human health series No 33, 2015. Vienna: International Atomic Energy.

3 October 2024