

# QA IN THE PHYSICIAN CLINIC

Bridging the Healthcare Performance Gap

## BUILDING YOUR DEPARTMENT'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

A healthy quality program has three critical components. These include quality assurance, quality improvement and performance improvement. Together, they are collectively known as the quality continuum.

Just as every healthcare organization needs to have a healthy quality continuum if it is to be operationally and financially successful in meeting the needs of its patients and communities, every department needs to have an effective continuum if it is to be what it needs to be for the organization. A strong quality continuum helps an organization in living up to the expectations of the people who count on it to meet their needs for access to great patient care.

Historically, the healthcare team has been thought of as those traditional inpatient clinically oriented departments that are directly involved in the delivery of patient care. That team of providers is quickly growing as the quality of care a patient experiences is impacted by many providers across a much larger continuum of care. While they are key members of the team, it is also important to recognize that they could not be as effective in their roles if it were not for the contributions of the non-clinical members of the team.

The physician clinic is one of the relatively new clinical areas

that plays a very important role in assuring high quality patient care, patient safety and a strong reputation for the hospital. It makes a major contribution to the management of a patient's clinical condition by managing the patient's clinical needs on an outpatient basis. It has a significant impact on the patient's quality of life on a day-to-day basis.

Hospital-based physician clinics control a very important aspect of the patient experience—the ability of the patient to experience optimal quality of life in spite of any clinical morbidities. This very important patient care area controls the activities that monitor and adjust patient care activities in an attempt to prevent worsening of a patient's clinic condition on an ongoing basis. This aspect of patient care goes a long way in creating the patient experience. (See the on-line module titled *Building the Patient Experience*.)

Patient management is a very important concern in today's healthcare environment. With the shrinking healthcare dollar, increased scrutiny by outside agencies and growing accountability for under-management that results in patient complications or deterioration, the physician clinic

has some pretty big responsibilities. Some of the important contributions made by this department include:

1. The coordination of patient care activities that promote wellness.
2. The timely follow-up on inpatient care to minimize the potential for readmission.
3. The timely coordination of outpatient diagnostics and consultation services that promote optimal patient health.
4. The promotion of patient care activities, such as education, that promote patient safety.

In addition to the control of the outpatient experience in the healthcare setting, the physician clinic plays an important role in the consultation with and education of other members of the healthcare team in an effort to ensure the delivery of the highest quality of care possible. As you review the enclosed list of quality assurance activities for which the pharmacy has primary responsibility, one can appreciate just how important this clinical service's role is as a member of the healthcare team.

*A healthy quality continuum allows our people to know that:*

1. *they are in control of their futures;*
2. *their efforts make a difference, and*
3. *that they are part of creating something better for tomorrow than what already exists today.*

*They come to appreciate the contributions they make in meeting the mission and creating the vision of the organization.*



## SO WHAT IS QUALITY!

Quality in healthcare encompasses the ability of an organization or provider to make patients feel very well cared for at the same time they are making them feel deeply cared about. When patients define quality, these are the two things that they repeatedly say they are looking for. For health care's customers, these seem like pretty easy requests and they are becoming less and less tolerant when providers don't get them right.

In today's healthcare environment, quality is about making people feel safe in an environment where they can also feel that they are receiving state-of-the-art care from people who are on top of those variables that could place them in harms way. Safety is a pretty broad term for patients as it ranges from a sense of feeling physically safe in the environment to feeling that they are receiving the very best care that can be delivered by people who genuinely care about the outcomes that their actions lead to. They also want to feel informed and in control of their patient experience.

For the people in the physician clinic, quality means timely and appropriate outpatient management that is consistent with current standards of practice in a way that is sensitive to the need for patients to feel that they are in control. The healthcare system is pretty complex and often difficult for experienced healthcare professionals to understand. For the average patient, it is commonly a trip into the twilight zone. The user-friendliness that a healthcare provider can drive into the patient experience can go a long ways in building healthy relationships with patients and communities.

The average patient can not actually judge the quality of the patient care they receive to a level that creates a genuine level of comfort. They can not determine if the battery of tests being ordered by the physician are truly the best tests or if the treatment and drugs are truly the best interventions. Because they need some measures that help them to feel good about their choices, they tend to rely heavily on pseudo-measures of quality.

Pseudo-measures are measures that patients and family members can judge more easily because they are familiar with what they are and what they should look like if quality exists. The most common pseudo-measures in healthcare have traditionally been cleanliness, friendliness, physical appearance, physical safety, quality of the food and the perception of teamwork. Factors that impact the patient's perception of safety is taking an important role as a very influential pseudo-measure. If these pseudo-measures convey a sense of quality, people assume that there is a pretty good chance that the quality of the clinical care is good also.

The measure of quality for people looking to health care is found in the attention to details that they observe. The more attention to details that they witness in pseudo-measures, the more comfortable they are that the same attention is given to the details of direct patient care. Great reputations are not built on being average. They are built on reaching well beyond average and paying close attention to the details that convey a message that providers take their roles in the delivery of great care seriously.

## WORKING WITH YOUR QA CALENDAR

The quality assurance calendar is a tool that helps a department to organize and manage its quality assurance and compliance-related activities in a way that reduces resource consumption and the risk of falling behind (see the PACE Workbook on *Working with Your Quality Calendar*). Historically, healthcare organizations have not utilized highly structured systems to collectively organize and manage their quality assurance or compliance-related activities. The lack of such a system has been one of the major contributing factors in prompting healthcare organizations to find themselves in trouble on surveys and having to put an inordinately large number of resources into ongoing efforts to maintain the basics.

Quality and compliance inside health care does not just happen. They are activities that need to be managed. As one looks at the list of compliance and quality assurance-related activities on the following pages, it is obvious how easy it would be to overlook something or get behind if you do not have a system that allows you to manage them.

As most of these activities are time sensitive, once they don't happen it is impos-

sible to make them up. For example, if a practitioner in a clinic setting fails to review a mammography report that is indicative of cancer, a patient could miss out of the opportunity to grow old and watch her grandchildren grow up. If a clinic fails to recognize the financial challenges of an elderly person and attempts to identify a medication regimen that works for that patient, the patient could experience a poorer quality of life.

As the healthcare industry continues to become more complex and more and more is asked of our people, systems like the quality calendar can help to better manage activities as it becomes increasingly necessary to find ways of doing more with fewer resources. The answer is not in working harder. It is in working smarter and the quality assurance calendar is a tool that can help department managers to do that.

Some important points in using your calendar are:

1. Only schedule activities that must be done on a Monday for that day. Mondays tend to be bad days in healthcare organizations because of

the many issues that spill over from the weekend. As most legal holidays fall on Mondays, it is the one day of the week that prompts people to more easily get behind because things from the holiday must be pushed to Tuesday.

2. Similarly, it is best if you minimize the number of flexible activities that need to be done on a Friday because that is generally the day that people are pushing to get things done for the weekend. It is also the most common day that people request off to have a long weekend.
3. Try to always set the schedule up so that compliance related activities never consume more than two hours in a given day for any one person. This is one of the reasons that a calendar is so helpful. It allows you to plan and balance things out. Most people can plan to commit up to two hours of the day to designated activities. They can also tend to find time to make those activities happen even on a day when there seems to be one crisis after another.
4. Try to always set the schedule so that



# CREATING YOUR QA CALENDAR!

The topics in the tables on the next pages list out the common quality assurance or compliance type activities that could be found on a QA calendar for the Clinic setting. Some may not apply to all organizations and others may need to be added as compliance standards are dependent on the services offered. Please review these tables to determine which topics are important to your calendar and then follow the instructions in the PACE training workbook titled *Working with Your Quality Calendars* to build you calendar. Please note that health care is a very dynamic industry and constantly subject to change. The completeness of the list and frequency recommendations in these tables should be regularly checked against those established by federal, state and local regulatory agencies.

	QA Accountability	Frequency
1	Arrangement for after hours care	Continuous
2	Documentation of phone calls	Continuous
3	Phone call triage	Continuous
4	Appointment for follow-up visits	With each visit
5	Appointment failure notification	With each "no show"
6	Practitioner acknowledgment of diagnostic results and consultations	With every diagnostic and consultation
7	Patient notification of abnormal diagnostics	With every abnormal diagnostic
8	Patient's Bill of Rights	With every new patient
9	Patient Notice of HIPAA	With every new patient and annually
10	Advanced directives	With every new patient
11	Consent to treatment	With every new patient
12	Smoking policies	Continuous
13	Reportable cases	With every reportable case
14	Patient education	For every new patient intervention
15	Patient information reinforcement	For every patient encounter
16	Staff licensures, registrations, and certifications	For every applicable staff member
15	Posting of practitioner licenses	For every medical and mid-level provider
16	Illness reporting	With every illness call in
17	Security of medical records	Continuous
18	HIPAA compliance	Continuous
19	Timely accessibility to medical records	Continuous
20	Release of medical records protocol	With each request
21	Patient problem lists	Continuous
22	Prescription medication log	Continuous
23	Fax transmittal protocol	With each fax
24	Informed consent	For each procedure requiring consent
25	Purging and destruction of medical record protocol	With each purge or destruction
26	Medication storage and security	Continuous
27	Sample security and storage	Continuous
28	Samples log	Continuous
29	Medication and supply FIFO	Continuous

# CREATING YOUR QA CALENDAR!

	QA Accountability	Frequency
30	Medication refrigerator temperature checks	Daily
31	Medication freezer temperature checks	Daily
32	Narcotic control and management	Continuous
33	Vaccine availability	Continuous
34	Outdates	Continuous
35	Standard precautions	Continuous
36	Infection control compliance	Continuous
37	Communicable disease management	Continuous
38	Handwashing	Continuous
39	Reporting of public health issues	Continuous
40	Blood/body fluid exposure plan	Continuous
41	Abbreviation compliance	Continuous
42	Timing and dating of all orders and record entries	With every order
43	Use of multidose vials	Continuous
44	Cleaning/sterilization of equipment	Continuous
45	Biomed checks	Continuous
46	Medication dispensing to outpatient protocols	Continuous
47	Specimen management	With each specimen
48	Patient assessment	On each visit
49	New patient intake information	On each new visit
50	Clinic visit notes	On each visit
51	Authorization for minors	As per policy and state law
52	Safe medication practice compliance	Continuous
53	Reportable event management	With every reportable event
54	Sterile compounding protocol	With every compounding
55	Electric safety	Continuous
56	Telephone/verbal order management	With every order
57	Service contract review	Annually
58	Service contract renewal	Annually or on term
59	CLIA certification for lab	Continuous
60	Blood glucose nursing certification	Per policy and before expiration
61	Blood glucose calibration	Per policy and manufacturer's recommendation
62	Staff competencies	Continuous
63	Telephone advice protocols	As per protocol
64	Crash cart or emergency cart checks	Daily
65	Drug box control	Continuous
66	Drug box outdate management	Continuous

# CREATING YOUR QA CALENDAR!

	QA Accountability	Frequency
67	Narcotic and general key control	Continuous
68	Biomedical equipment certification	Continuous
69	Non-biomedical equipment certification	Upon purchase
70	Building security	Continuous
71	Parking lot and sidewalk safety	Continuous
72	Standard precaution compliance	Continuous
73	Infection control compliance	Continuous
74	Cleaning protocols between patients	Continuous
75	Daily cleaning protocol	Daily
76	Deep cleaning protocol	Per protocol
77	Sharps management	Continuous
78	Safe box security	Continuous
79	Safe box disposal	When 3/4 full
80	New chemical training	Before use
81	Secure MSDS and assure appropriate precautions	Before new chemical use
82	Employee right-to-know MSDS training	On orientation before chemical use and annually
83	Separation of patient care and cleaning chemicals	Continuous
84	Flooring integrity	Continuous
85	Baseboard integrity	Continuous
86	Surface washability	Continuous
87	Annual fire safety training	Annually
88	Annual general safety training	Annually
89	Annual infection control training	Annually
90	Staff certification for special equipment management and skills	Before expiration
91	Annual policy and procedure review	Annually
92	Employee training on new/revised policies and procedures	On creation of or revision of policy or procedure
93	Ergonomics compliance	Continuous
94	PPE compliance	Continuous
95	Eye wash station integrity	Continuous
96	General trash management and disposal	Daily or when every receptacles are 3/4 full
97	Annual review of employee job descriptions	Annually
98	Annual employee performance appraisal	Annually
99	Horizontal surface cleaning	Daily and on each use
100	Deep cleaning schedule	Per schedule
101	Ceiling tile integrity	Continuous
102	Storage 4 inches off the floor	Continuous
103	Egress management	Continuous
104	Fire safety	Continuous



# KEEPING PACE WITH TODAY'S STANDARDS

Quality assurance or compliance-related activities are extremely important in a healthcare organization because they are generally related to safety and can have a significant impact on patient satisfaction. They frequently involve precautionary steps taken by an organization to prevent an untoward event and to be prepared in the event of a disaster or break in the routine that could place people or the organization in harm's way.

For example, while providers hope they will never need them, there are many precautionary activities that healthcare organizations need to be skilled at in the event there is a fire. They need to know that we have a strong plan to protect people in the event of a natural disaster. These are also important activities for departments such as the physician clinic because these departments often need to play a very important support role. The moment of crisis is not the time to be determining what the department's contribution should be.

Healthcare organizations also need to know that the day-to-day risk is reduced for people who come into their buildings and the organization. They need to know that the organization is in compliance with current principles of clinical management. They need to know that general safe medication practices are followed.

Too often healthcare organizations find themselves at risk because they become complacent about quality assurance related activities. As so many of the activities are precautionary in nature and many organizations view them as routine for regulatory compliance, it is very easy for an organization to elect to take short cuts or overlook striving for 100% compliance. The danger is in the fact that an organization can't make it up to a patient or a community member or employee when its failure to stay current negatively effects any one of them. If its reputation in the community is damaged, it may never recover.

Proactive compliance is significantly less resource intensive than running to catch up. Developing a corrective action plan in response to a Medicare Condition of Participation survey is never the best way to achieve compliance. Working to overcome the damage created by a negative outcome is definitely more expensive and resource intensive than ensuring the negative outcome could not happen. As the saying goes, "an ounce of prevention is more valuable than a pound of cure." This

is particularly true in health care where the cost of a negative outcome can be particularly steep. A well structured quality assurance program inside the quality continuum can provide for that ounce of prevention to protect an organization.

The majority of the compliance standards for the physician clinic relate to general safety and timely intervention. These

are two very big areas of responsibility where compliance is critical.

When any of these areas of responsibility fall out of compliance it is important to bring them back into line as soon as possible.

Because of the magnitude of some of the responsibilities, retrospectively trying to fix them can be a nightmare in addition to placing the organization at risk because of non-compliance. For example, the failure to prescribed the correct medication and monitor its clinical impact can result in patient harm. Failure to appropriately manage and secure samples can result in regulatory issues that can prevent their use. Failure to maintain a safe environment can result in untoward patient events. Proactively dealing with issues through prevention can reduce resource consumption by as much as 25 -33%. Every minute appropriately spent on planning (such as the creation of a balanced QA calendar) can save 10 minutes in execution time.

Historically healthcare organizations have had poor systems for managing and documenting quality assurance related activities. Too often those systems for managing these activities have existed in the minds of our managers. While the mind is a very powerful place, the stresses of today's healthcare environment make it a poor stand-alone tool in creating the kind of efficiency and effectiveness we need. As a result, too many things end up being retrospectively repaired rather than proactively managed. The quality calendar system is an approach to proactive activity management. If the average clinic is able to reduce time and/or resource consumption by an average of 33% because it uses tools to improve its efficiency and effectiveness, it can find itself capable of managing more with less in a less stress-

ful environment. This is an important goal in today's healthcare environment. It also reduces the amount of time spent on crisis management which is one of the industry's greatest threats to resources.

When a quality assurance or compliance activity goes out of compliance, it is a department's responsibility to bring that activity back into compliance as quickly as

QA Calendar								
	Frequency	Responsible	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June
No Out-dates	Every Drug	Susan	SK OK	SK OK	SK QI	SK OK	SK OK	SK OK

possible in a way that will hold the compliance. The department needs to document the steps it took to achieve that compliance and the ongoing activities to monitor it.

The first step is to set up the quality assurance calendar with all of the compliance-oriented activities that are important to the organization. Once the list is complete, the manager, with the assistance of his or her departmental team, defines when each activity is to be completed along with who will be responsible for it. (Remember the stronger the team approach, the greater the potential for success and the more that can be achieved with fewer resources. As long as activities remain in compliance the only documentation that is necessary is to complete the required log for the activity and to indicate an OK on the calendar. When an activity moves out of compliance, a department should be able to demonstrate that it has quickly moved through the steps of the PACE cycle. Documentation should demonstrate that it quickly identified the issue (moving the issue to its quality improvement calendar), PLANNED to re-establish compliance, ACTED to initiate the plan, CHECKED to make sure that the plan achieved the designed results and ENHANCED the plan to achieve the best outcomes possible. Once compliance is re-established and a short period of more intensive monitoring demonstrates compliance, the department can return to its normal schedule of monitoring as defined by the calendar.

The calendar should be evaluated each year as part of the annual review of services to determine needed additions and revisions that would increase departmental efficiency in achieving continuous compliance.



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*Success has a price tag on it, and it  
reads COURAGE,  
DETERMINATION, DISCIPLINE,  
RISK TAKING, PERSEVERANCE,  
and CONSISTENCY—doing the right  
THING for the RIGHT REASONS and  
not just when we feel like it.*

*James B. Menton*

*The Future Starts with a Strong Today!*

Building a strong reputation and future for a healthcare organization starts with building a strong today. In many ways it is like building a new building. If you don't start out with a sound foundation it becomes increasingly difficult to build a structure that can be as tall as you would like or that can withstand the various elements that place stress on it. When the foundation isn't strong, you frequently find yourself having to put additional resources into shoring it up and to apply patches where necessary. You also tend to find yourself having to monitor it more closely every time the structure is placed under stress to make sure it will hold up. A healthy quality assurance program is about making sure a healthcare organization has a strong foundation on which to build tomorrow and the future. If an organization is constantly struggling to maintain compliance with today's standards, the activities steal valuable time and resources away from efforts that could be used to build a healthier tomorrow. Given the strain on today's healthcare resources, providers need to ensure that they are getting the most they can from what they have. They need to make sure that quality lives today so it is easier to build a better tomorrow.

## BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

A healthy quality program is about making sure that our organizations are being true to the business of health care. That business is the delivery of high quality patient care in an environment that makes our patients and communities feel well cared for and deeply cared about. It is about making sure that our organizations are healthy and strong for today, tomorrow and into the future.

The quality program creates the structure to support the creation and implementation of the many systems that (1) ensure that our organizations and patient care services are what they need to be to make our organizations strong for today, (2) continuously work to improve and meet the changing needs of tomorrow as technological advancements continue to reshape the delivery of patient care, and (3) bring the strategic plan and vision of an organization to life while holding true to the mission and values of the organiza-

tion. A healthy quality program is about much more than making sure that our organizations are meeting the expectations of outside regulators and the many external customers that enter our doors every day.

The mission defines why our healthcare organizations exist. The vision defines where we picture our organizations to be at some point in the future if the organization is to remain strategically positioned for success while it remains true to its mission and values. Our values define those behaviors we hold to be important to every day life if we are to remain true to our missions (who we are).

It can be very easy for these important messages to become fluff and pie-in-the-sky words that only raise more doubt and questions if people can not see the path that brings them to life. A healthy quality program provides that path by creating

the structures and systems that make proactive change possible.

The mission, vision and values of an organization come to life when they are successfully married together through the organization's quality program and strategic planning activities. These two activities create the environment for the creation of a culture for quality where patients feel well cared for and deeply cared about while healthcare providers have the potential to feel good about their contributions in improving the quality of life for the public that entrusts them with their care.

