



## Understanding Continuous Quality Improvement

### Description:

This tool provides an explanation and examples of two models of continuous quality improvement.

### How it can be used:

Continuous Quality Improvement is a coordinated approach to ongoing cycles of measurement, analysis and improvement. It provides an opportunity to assess, monitor and implement needed improvement projects to ensure better organizational performance. The purpose of continuous quality improvement programs is to improve health care by identifying problems, implementing and monitoring corrective action and studying overall effectiveness. This tool will provide an overview of what it means and the key models that are used.

---

When we talk about Quality Improvement, we are referring to the science developed over the past few decades by Dr. W. Edwards Deming and Dr. Joseph Juran, and promoted by Dr. Donald Berwick of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement.

A quality improvement program is comprised of a number of quality improvement initiatives that all drive toward a common goal – to improve the quality of health care for clients.

A quality improvement initiative has the following features:

- Interdisciplinary teams empowered and trained to set goals for improvement;
- Teams that identify causes of problems, barriers to quality, or flaws in system design that lead to poor quality;
- Teams that test out different ideas for improving how care is delivered;
- Teams that conduct frequent targeted measurements of quality in a way that gives them instant feedback on whether the changes they are testing are heading in the right direction.

The quality improvement journey has multiple phases, with each step building on the previous one. For example, you must understand and analyze your current processes before you can implement improvements. Furthermore, all types of organizations can use quality improvement tools to map and understand their processes. Using the right methodology and tools will allow the team to work smarter rather than harder and provide better results. One recommended methodology is the Model for Improvement.

### Model for Improvement

Many quality improvement councils use a methodology called the Model for Improvement. This is a simple but powerful framework for structuring any quality improvement project. Quality improvement teams that use this model have the highest chance of success.

The Model for Improvement has two basic components: the first addresses three fundamental questions, and the second uses the rapid cycle improvement process comprised of a series of Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles to develop, test and implement changes for improvement.

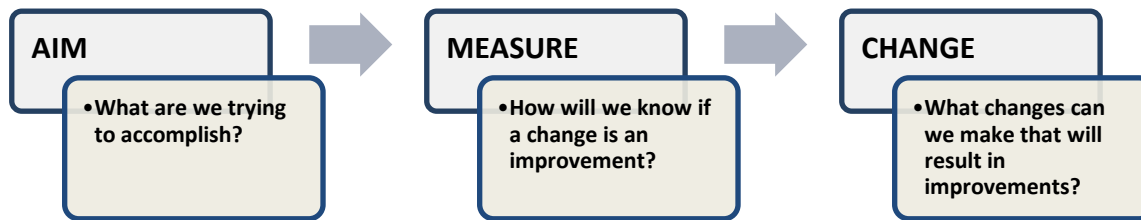
First, assemble the team. To be successful, a quality improvement initiative needs the support of the whole team – from the receptionist and clerk to managers, providers and others. That said, although the team needs to be inclusive, inviting a maximum of 10 people to join keeps the team manageable.



Consider the following checklist when forming a team:

- Have we included a representative from each section that is involved in the work?
- Have we considered including non-registered staff who also support the work?
- Have we identified a team leader?
- Do we have a physician or nursing champion on the team?
- Should we include a constructive skeptic on our team?
- Do we have someone with quality improvement skills to facilitate our progress?
- Which external partners should be included?

Within the Model for Improvement methodology, there are three key questions. These are represented in the **AIM-MEASURE-CHANGE** process.



**AIM** – every quality improvement initiative needs a clearly defined aim. In addition, it should be:

- Clear – to create a clear plan you need a clear aim
- Time-specific – set a goal date for when you want to accomplish your aims
- Stretchable – aim for small incremental change
- Valuable – ensure that your aim has real value to your clients

**MEASURE** – this tells you whether the changes you are making are actually leading to tangible improvements. Measures give concrete evidence to support your case for change and increase buy-in. Types of measures include:

- Outcome measures – capture system performance and represent the ‘voice’ of the client
- Process measures – the steps in the process and represent the ‘voice’ of the system
- Balancing measures – looks at the system from different perspectives. Are improvements in one area causing problems in other parts of the system?

**CHANGE** – change ideas are specific and practical changes that focus on improving specific steps of a process while change concepts are the broader principles that offer general direction for planning improvements.

The **PLAN-DO-STUDY-ACT** (PDSA) cycle is called a rapid cycle improvement process. The PDSA cycle is a way to keep quality improvement initiatives small and manageable and, at the same time, to generate momentum by creating early successes.

Building on each cycle of PDSA, for each category of change being tested, helps teams achieve short- and long-term goals. PDSA is the approach upon which many accreditation programs were built.

