## 4. Audit

By the end of the attachment you should:

* Demonstrate an understanding of audit

**Clinical audit**

This is the only time in your undergraduate career that you are formally taught how to perform an audit. In addition, you will be required to submit an audit for your F2 application, and many young doctors use their Year 6 audit for this purpose.

Clinical audit examines an individual/team’s performance at a particular activity. It is increasingly important in all branches of medicine. Clinical governance makes it essential for GPs to be actively involved in audit. As well as improving clinical standards, audit can actively promote teamwork. Team members who have played a part in clinical audit are more likely to identify with its findings and be more committed to achieving its aims.

 **Select topic**

**Audit cycle**

Select topic

Collect data

Agree and implement change

Collect data

Analyse data

Set standards

Agree target criteria

Identify specific aims

It is vital to choose a topic that interests you *and* improves services to patients.

**Identify specific aims**

You should clearly identify what you want to see gained by the exercise. The desired outcome might, for example, be improved control of hypertension in patients with Type 2 Diabetes.

**Agree target criteria and standards**

*Target Criteria* are the gold-standard or evidence-based criteria that are used to compare current practice against e.g. ‘Patients with Type 2 Diabetes should have BP < 140/80’ (NICE 2010). They tell us what we *should* be doing.

*Standards* are a measure of the frequency with which you judge that the target criteria should be met in your practice sample e.g. ‘Patients with Type 2 Diabetes should have BP <140/90 in 70% of cases’. Standards may depend on the clinical importance as well as the feasibility of achieving the target criteria.

**Devise method for collecting data / Collect data**

A little time spent planning exactly what data you need to collect and how you will collect it can save a massive amount of time and make your analysis much easier!

**Analyse and compare with target criteria and standards**

This is the moment of truth! You will see how well performance matches up to target criteria and whether your standards are reached.

**Agree and implement changes**

Where performance falls short of the standard you need to suggest ways it could be improved, and how these suggestions could be implemented.

**Re-audit to evaluate change**

If you had longer you should, after a defined period, allow the changes time to work, and collect data again in exactly the same way as before. This will allow comparison with the original data to see if the changes have been effective. Only when this has been done successfully has the audit cycle been completed. This is often referred to as 'closing the audit cycle’.

Clearly you will not have enough time to complete *all* these stages during your attachment. You should however be able to select a topic, agree criteria and standards, collect and analyse your data and make suggestions on how performance can be brought up to your standard.

**Clinical audit: the essential steps**

* Select topic
* Identify specific aims
* Agree target criteria and standards
* Devise method for collecting data
* Collect data
* Analyse and compare with target criteria and standards
* Agree and implement changes
* Collect further data at a later date to evaluate changes

**Mini audit**

When selecting a topic, choose something that interests you. Your GP Teacher may well have ideas on topics you might choose. Patient notes will be held electronically, allowing data to be collected easily. This exercise should take no more than 3–4 hours maximum.

No matter how modest the topic, your write-up should show a good understanding of the *process* of audit, with clearly defined *criteria* and *standards.* Your write-up need not be more than two sides of A4.

Example:

You may choose to look at an aspect of communication between primary and secondary care. How satisfactory is communication between your practice and the local hospital? You might choose *one* aspect of communication for closer examination (e.g. discharge notes, referral letters to hospital, telephone calls, laboratory results). You would need to draft some minimum criteria for effective communication by this method and then audit this activity within the practice to see if your standards are achieved. For example, your minimum criteria for a discharge note might include name, address, date of discharge, diagnosis. You might then choose to look at ten discharge notes and see how they compare with your standards for each criterion.

We are well aware of your limited time in the practice and so we encourage you to **keep it short and simple** (see example on the intranet).

**Suggested reading**

Fraser RC, Lakhami MK, Baker RH, *Evidence-based Audit in General Practice.*1998, Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford ISBN 0 75063104 X.

**Prize audit**

Should you find the ‘mini-audit’ too restrictive, we would be delighted to encourage you to consider the Prize Audit option! If you decide to submit an entry for the prize you are not required to do a ‘mini-audit’.

The North & West London Faculty of the Royal College of General Practitioners have very kindly funded an annual prize to be awarded to the best supplementary audit submitted by a Year 6 student (the Adam Snape Audit Prize). This is entirely optional. It might be on any aspect of general practice that has caught your attention during your attachment, e.g. prescribing, an aspect of practice administration (e.g. time spent in the waiting room), some aspect of chronic disease management. Choose something that will be (a) interesting and (b) practicable within the two-week period.

Headings in the report should include:

* Why you chose this particular topic
* How you set about answering your question
* Data you collected
* Conclusions from that data and implications for further action

When assessing submissions the examiners will be using the following criteria:

1. The submission shows a clear understanding of audit as a process e.g. determining standards, cycle of audit, etc.

2. There is discussion of the implications of the audit for the practice in terms of change.

3. The submission should be clear and easy to follow.

4. The project should be manageable given the two-week attachment i.e. be an appropriate size and complexity.

5. The submission should be interesting

The entries will be marked by the Department and the £100 prize awarded during the spring. The prize winner will be invited to make a brief presentation at a meeting of the North & West London Faculty of the Royal College of General Practitioners. The winning entry for 2011/12 is on the intranet.

*Please note that submissions for the special audit prize must be submitted to Steve Platt in the Department* ***within 6 weeks of the end of your rotation****.*