



## **Quality Improvement Projects**

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### **Abstract**

The QIPs are a concept that have been developed to promote leadership and clinical improvement skills in student learners.

The concept of transformational change and its three key theoretical stages are mirrored in Quality Improvement Projects (QIPs). These changes (psychological, Convictional and Behavioural) are integral to developing a learner's skills in practice which will better prepare them for their professional career.

On reflection there are challenges associated with QIPs that relate to clinical maturity, implementation of change and the time needed to effectively deliver QIPs.

However, on balance these projects present a unique learning opportunity that will present students with the ability to demonstrate and develop skills that are difficult to practically apply anywhere else.

The application of these projects in primary care also prepare students for the professional responsibility of appraisal and revalidation regardless of their speciality of choice.

### **Keywords**

Transformational Change; Quality Improvement; Leadership

### **Reflection**

The poster was developed to illustrate the concept of Quality Improvement in Practice as part of an educational activity that students can engage in, across both primary and secondary care.

In Primary Care the concept of Quality Improvement forms part of the foundation for appraisal and revalidation processes. This concept of developing existing improvement activity to formal QIPs is a natural educational progression for students already engaged in research projects

during their medical school career. Quality Improvement activity could be offered amongst existing research opportunity, building a platform for motivated students to explore change management and develop leadership.

The projects can be nested in any department however it is apparent that this may be easier to do in smaller teams where QIP activity is already in existence. It does not however rule out larger secondary care settings provided team members are invested.

It would be useful to further explore the student experience following an introduction of this type of learning. A comparison between primary and secondary care Quality Improvement Projects would be highly informative for future educational development.

Mesirow's transformative learning theory (1991) has three components that can be applied to Quality Improvement Projects. Clark (1991) discusses these three aspects consisting of Psychological, Convictional and Behavioural change that are intellectually mirrored in the practical process of Educational transformation. This theoretical underpinning of transformational change requires an adjustment to thinking about practice improvement and development.

In primary care this has traditionally involved audit and presentation of findings. Quality improvement asks the practitioner to explore this further and to develop and implement change.

The first (Psychological) stage involves a change in cognitive approach to practice development. The main change being that of implementing a change rather than simply highlighting potential change. The practical implementation of delivering improvements has a very different implication to simply formulating theoretical solutions.

Mezirow (1997) discusses the challenge of changing perspectives and how change and Improvement can be delivered.

The second (Convictional) stage of educational transformation and Quality Improvement, involves reassessing the existing understanding of practice and evolving this. Quality Improvement can only occur if the fundamental aspect of practice focused on is revaluated, changed and then implemented.

In order for this change to be implemented the practitioners involved need to have changed their perspective on that particular clinical practice and agree to the change.

It is important to take into consideration that student learners may find this aspect particularly challenging in a team where the change proposed is not accepted by all those involved. The professional maturity needed to develop clinical practice change may be particularly challenging for learners that are both new and temporary to a clinical team.

This change to existing beliefs about practice would form the foundation for further transformational change.

Dirkx (2006) discusses transformational change and its underlying theory from an emotive perspective which is also fundamental to understanding the delivery of QIPs and the associated challenge.

The final (behavioural) stage of educational transformation involves a practical behavioural change. This is the last and most crucial part of Quality Improvement, whereby a change to practice is implemented by all those involved and that this change is maintained.

Practical clinical change involves delivering service provision in a different way to existing practice. This aspect requires both time and clinical ability to deliver this change.

Early learners may find this aspect of Quality Improvement the most difficult as it would require an understanding of the potential effects across a team. This would involve logistical, financial and practical considerations to the proposed changes. These changes once implemented would then need ongoing oversight. However, the process of considering how this might be done and educationally evaluating all aspects of delivering practical change is a key part of Quality Improvement in a learner.

This further step in delivering change from research is the aspect of learning that is missing from traditional audit and service evaluation projects. Cranton (1996) discusses the requirement to develop the opportunity for learners to develop these skills.

It is understood that QIPs push a learner to develop more than basic research skills, evolving thought into leadership, team working, financial consideration and practice development. These are key skills for tomorrow's doctors.

In summary the concept of QIPs are arguably challenging due to time and potential system constraints however the opportunity to harness leadership and change management skills are highly valuable to early student learners who will be tomorrow's leaders.

## **References**

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