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978-1-906-98535-6 - Let's Do Audit!: A practical guide to improving the quality of medical care through criterion-based audit

Andrew Weeks, Katie Lightly and Sam Ononge

Frontmatter

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# Let's do audit!

A practical guide to improving  
the quality of medical care  
through criterion-based audit

**Andrew Weeks, Katie Lightly**  
and **Sam Ononge**



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# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

This book is aimed at all those who want to improve the quality of the medical care they provide. Whether you are a nurse, doctor, manager, health-care assistant, student or laboratory technician, this book will show you how to examine the quality of the care you provide through criterion-based audit. In this process, you will decide what you should be doing in any circumstance, examine whether or not you are doing it and then look for ways of improving your care until you are doing it correctly. It has been likened to ‘holding up a mirror’ to your clinical practice.<sup>1</sup> The process is simple, free and effective. It can be carried out by anyone who wants to provide better medical care.

Although we all wish that we could provide better care it is frequently seen as someone else’s problem. How often have we heard colleagues say “The care in this hospital is terrible: I wish someone would sort it out” or “If only we had the right sort of managers (or equipment, or government, or system), then our healthcare centre could be so much better”? Although it is true that leaders have a responsibility to do their best, we healthcare providers also have that responsibility. We may not have the money to buy the new expensive equipment that we want or the power to change things radically at policy level but we can all make changes in our own practice. It need not be expensive; it could be writing a guideline on a piece of paper and sticking it up on the wall, or reading up about a new development and teaching others about it, or even tying a copy of a drug formulary to the desk in the emergency room so that it is always available for staff to check the dose of prescriptions. Whatever it is, no matter how small it may seem, we can all play our part in improving practice. And we may find that a small amount of change by every healthcare professional has a far greater effect than some dramatic change by the Government – after all, there is great power in numbers. A single drop of water may seem insignificant but, when combined with many other drops, it can become a rushing river or a mighty ocean.

This book was written as the result of a training project called ‘Audit in Maternity Care’ which was run in Ugandan maternity units in 2001–2003.<sup>2</sup>

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As such, many of the examples that we use relate to maternity care in African health units. The principles of audit are universal, however, and we hope that healthcare staff from every country and in every specialty will find it useful.

### How to use this book

We produced the book so that it can be used either as a personal resource or as a training tool for teaching others.

The ideal way to use it is for a group to work together, each with a copy of the book. The book is divided into six lessons. Each is designed to run for about 1 hour and the group should meet together every week for 6 weeks. Before each meeting, each person in the group should read the next lesson in the book. Then, at the meeting, the group can work together through the exercises (teaching pages) which are found at the end of each lesson. You are free to photocopy these pages to hand out to the class. It is useful to discuss each question as a group in order to gain other people's opinions.

If you are working alone, read through the exercises and jot the answers down on a piece of paper before reading over the sections of the chapter where you were unsure. The answers are not provided in a block but can all be found within the text of the preceding chapter.

Managers wishing to promote audit in their organisations may decide to use this book as the basis of a 6-week course. This course does not require a teacher but will need a coordinator to monitor attendance and to produce certificates upon completion. Typically, a group would form and meet together once a week to discuss the issues and complete the exercises. It works best if the students purchase their own book at the start but the organisation agrees to refund the book cost upon successful completion of the course. This ensures that those who join are motivated and also encourages them to complete the 6 weeks.