



Leaflet 2

The Difference between Clinical Audit and Research

Grey Areas

There may be times when it is uncertain where research ends, and clinical audit begins. In some cases, there may be no published guidelines and no prior knowledge of best practice on which to base standards.

This is an occasion where a pre-audit investigation may be performed to measure baseline performance on which to base your standards. However, if at any time you are comparing treatments or introducing new treatments you **will** be performing research.

Is my project Research or Clinical Audit?

Complete the questions in the following table to determine whether your project is research or clinical audit.

If you answered:

Yes to Q1 and Q2 and No to Q3 then your project is **clinical audit**.

If you answered differently, your project may be **research** for which you will need formal ethical approval.

No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Question 1. Is the purpose of your project to improve the quality of patient care in your local setting?	Question 2. Will the project involve comparison of practice against standards?	Question 3. When performing your project, does it involve changes to treatment / services?

Further information about clinical audit is available from SharePoint on the clinical audit pages: <https://nhsbloodandtransplant.sharepoint.com/sites/Clinical/SitePages/Clinical%20Audit.aspx> where full details of all completed clinical audit reports can be found (accessed 1st June 2020). All leaflets in this series (INF450-INF460) are available via the controlled document library on NHSBT Intranet (Link)

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Clinical Audit and Research

This leaflet details the similarities and important differences between the two disciplines.



Remember – “Research is concerned with discovering the right thing to do: Audit is ensuring it is done right” (Smith, R. 1992, Audit & Research, BMJ, 305:905-6)

Research...

...creates new knowledge and forms the basis of agreed guidelines and standards i.e. what practice should be.

Clinical Audit...

...looks at actual practice, compares it with guidelines. Are we practising as we should? If not, why not?

Similarities between Audit and Research

Both answer questions about quality of care or service.

Both involve sampling, data collection and analysis of findings.



Remember – Stakeholders are the people / groups who can change practice and those whose work may be affected by the audit.

Differences between Audit and Research

Research
Attempts to create generalisable new knowledge regarding best practice.
Tests hypotheses that evaluate or compare interventions.
Usually large scale over a long time period.
May involve patients receiving a completely new treatment.
May involve patients being given different treatments.
Uses random representative sampling methods to ensure generalisability of findings.
Extensive statistical analysis is usually required.
Results need to be generalisable to a wider population.
No built-in mechanism to act on findings.
Findings can have a wide influence on clinical practice.
Always requires ethics committee approval.

Adapted from: “Defining Research.” NHS Health Research Authority (2017)
http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/docs/DefiningResearchTable_Oct2017-1.pdf
 (accessed 1st June 2020)



Remember – Without research we cannot know the most effective practice. Without audit we cannot know if it is being practised effectively.

Clinical Audit
Creates knowledge of current clinical practice and highlights need for improvement.
Measures current practice against a standard.
Usually smaller scale over a shorter time period.
Never involves patients receiving new treatments.
Does not affect the normal treatment of patients.
Does not necessarily need to use random representative sampling methods
Basic statistical analysis usually suffices.
Results are usually only relevant to the area evaluated.
Clear responsibility to act on findings through development of an action plan.
Findings usually only influence practice within the area evaluated
Does not usually require ethical approval.

Adapted from: “Defining Research.” NHS Health Research Authority (2017)
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