

CLINICAL GOVERNANCE

Written by: Dr Chris van Straten, Medical Director, Medical Services



Medicine has changed dramatically over the past 50 years. From my grandfathers generation when the pharmacology textbook was a tiny 40-page book that taught one how to make ones own tablets and emulsions to the hi-tech medications and massive databases we have now. Our current pharmacology textbook is hundreds of pages thick and in small print thats a lot of information that needs to be understood and applied appropriately on a daily basis. Clinical governance is supposed to be the tool that assists healthcare providers (HCP) to do this.

Clinical governance is a broad concept that has had many different meanings for different individuals working in different contexts globally depending on their level of training and their position within an organisation and the regions within which they work.

The definition of clinical governance, as quoted in the Clinical Governance Guide for Remote and Isolated Health Services in Australia September 2013 is clear and concise: The essence of clinical governance is to ensure that more right things happen to patients by making it easy to do the right thing, and less wrong things happen to patients less often by making it difficult to do the wrong thing Australian Institute of Company Directors. (2011). *The Boards role in clinical governance* (p.1). Sydney: Author.

Another definition of clinical governance that I like , describes it as:

The system by which the governing body, managers, clinicians and staff share responsibility and accountability for the quality of care, continuously improving, minimising risks, and fostering an environment of excellence in care for consumers and safeguarding high standards of care. This is achieved by creating an environment in which there is transparent responsibility and accountability for maintaining standards and by allowing excellence in clinical care to flourish. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. (May 2013). *NSQHS Standards guide for small hospitals*.

These are good definitions, but how do you practically achieve this considering our global context and the complexity of medicine? The exponential explosion of information and rapidly advancing digital age has brought with it a tsunami of information, too much information some might argue.

The good news is that as computing technology advances, so too has our ability to use digital tools to assist medical practice and support our HCPs on a daily basis.

By leveraging advances in electronic medical records, automation and access to medical databases we have been able to perform large scale peer review, and provide rapid feedback and support to HCPs in remote and inaccessible areas. The results have been very positive.

All our HCPs have access to a digital database called ClinicalKey ClinicalKey is a clinical search engine that helps doctors, nurses and other health professionals make better decisions anywhere, anytime, in any patient scenario.

This database is also available on smart phones via the ClinicalKey app. This means that our HCPs can access current, evidence-based, peer-reviewed data quickly and easily and accumulate Continued Medical Education (CME) points while doing so. HCPs can also access useful and relevant Patient Education Brochures for all medical conditions within seconds. These patient education brochures can be printed and handed to the patient during a consultation or emailed to the patient, empowering patients to better understand their medical condition and access quality information.

International SOS has developed a comprehensive clinical governance system that incorporates innovative utilisation of eHealth tools including Telemedicine and mHealth tools. Clinical governance has gone digital!

I think the future looks very bright indeed.

There is an axiom that the purpose of data is action

Mohammed, Cheng, Rouse, & Marshall, 2001



The key elements of continuous quality improvement include:



Accountability



Linking evaluation to planning



Achieving improvement through incremental steps



Being driven by input from all levels of staff, management, and other stakeholders



A commitment to team work



Continuous review of progress

Clinical governance: A system through which organisations are accountable for continuously improving the quality of their services and safeguarding high standards of care. This is achieved by creating an environment in which there is transparent responsibility and accountability for maintaining standards, and by allowing excellence in clinical care to flourish. Clinical indicators are a measurable component of the standard, with explicit criteria for inclusion, exclusion, timeframe, and setting.