

MEDICAL AUDIT

INTRODUCTION

In the White Paper "Working for Patients" (Cm 555) the Government attaches great importance to the development of a comprehensive system of medical audit covering both Primary Health Care and the Hospital and Community Health Services. The Government warmly welcomes the recent initiatives of the Royal Colleges and other professional bodies in this field and seeks to work with the medical profession to achieve this objective.

This document briefly describes present progress and challenges in the field of medical audit and restates the principles to which the Government is committed. It sets out in more detail than was possible in the White Paper itself how those principles might be developed organisationally. It is offered as a basis for discussion with interested parties as to how an effective framework for medical audit might be implemented.

SECTION 1: THE VALUE OF MEDICAL AUDIT

1.1 Medical audit can be defined as the systematic, critical analysis of the quality of medical care, including the procedures used for diagnosis and treatment, the use of resources, and the resulting outcome and quality of life for the patient. Because a patient's primary concern is for a correct diagnosis to be made and for effective treatment to be given, medical audit must be central to any programme to enhance the overall quality of care given to patients in the NHS. An effective programme of audit will help to provide the necessary reassurance to doctors, patients and managers that the best possible quality of service is being achieved within the resources available.