

Council has decided that from time to time the College should issue 'Guidelines' on matters of particular moment in surgical practice.

The College has been assiduous in promoting clinical audit without attempting to impose direction on local practice. However, following publication of the White Paper ('Working for Patients'), Council now considers that it is appropriate to promulgate its views on clinical audit.

Council recognizes that it is not practicable to implement all of these guidelines in every hospital. One important consideration is that there must be adequate funding to meet the additional demands placed on staff at all levels and to provide suitable computer hardware and software. Nevertheless, the requirement for audit is here to stay and it is important that the Profession should take the lead.

Sir Ian Todd KBE  
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## A. ROLES

The care of patients is the responsibility of individual consultants and the prime concern of medical staff. The Royal College of Surgeons (the College) promotes clinical audit and quality control in order to ensure a high level of care of patients in surgical departments.

The roles of the College are

- to offer guidance to surgeons, health authorities and others striving to improve the standards of surgical care;
- to ensure that surgeons are trained to high clinical standards;
- to encourage medical staff to develop and use critical faculties;
- to promote the effective management of resources.

## B. AUDIT

### 1. DEFINITION

Audit is the systematic appraisal of the implementation and outcome of any process in the context of prescribed targets and standards.

Clinical audit is the process by which medical staff collectively review, evaluate and improve their practice. This should include

- the access of patients to care (appointments, investigations, admissions, waiting times);
- the process and the outcome of care;
- the administrative and financial constraints relevant to clinical practice.

The discipline of the process

- encourage change and improvement in clinical practice;
- provides peer support for individual clinicians;
- is an important educational process for both seniors and juniors;
- raises the overall quality of clinical care in a department.

### 2. RESPONSIBILITY

Consultant surgical staff are ultimately responsible for initiating clinical audit.

The College recommends that the Surgical Tutor should normally be responsible for

- ensuring that the audit programmes are developed;
- nominating within each department one consultant with overall responsibility for organising and developing the programmes.