

## Summary

For many generations, health professionals have made critical analyses of the quality of the clinical care they provide. Only recently however has this process been put on a systematic basis, with the development of clinical audit.

Clinical Audit involves systematically looking at the procedures used for diagnosis, care and treatment, examining how associated resources are used and investigating the effect care has on the outcome and quality of life for the patient. In 1989, it was given particular impetus by the NHS reforms and promoted as a valuable tool to improve the quality of professional care and ultimately patient choice. Since then, over £200 million has been spent on a variety of audit initiatives and there have been a number of significant and exciting developments. Its importance in the contracting cycle for example has been heightened, with increased relevance to both purchasers and providers. There has been a movement to multi-disciplinary audit.

Four years on, it is appropriate to review the progress made and to consider the future.