

What is the difference between clinical audit and research?

"Research is about obtaining new knowledge and finding out what treatments are the most effective. Clinical audit is about quality and finding out if best practice is being practised. Research tells us what we should be doing. Clinical audit tells us whether we are doing what we should be doing and how well we are doing it.

The National Research Ethics Service makes a clear distinction between clinical audit and research and states that, unlike research, clinical audit does not need approval from a research ethics committee."

Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership
[text downloaded from website: www.hquip.org.uk – April 2012]

DIFFERENTIATING AUDIT, SERVICE EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

November 2006

The "Ad Hoc Advisory Group on the Operation of NHS Research Ethics Committees" recommended NRES should develop guidelines to aid researchers and committees in deciding what is appropriate or inappropriate for submission to RECs, and NRES (with the Health Departments and with advice from REC members) has prepared the guidelines in the form of the attached table.

RESEARCH	CLINICAL AUDIT	SERVICE EVALUATION
The attempt to derive generalisable new knowledge including studies that aim to generate hypotheses as well as studies that aim to test them.	Designed and conducted to produce information to inform delivery of best care.	Designed and conducted solely to define or judge current care.
Quantitative research – designed to test a hypothesis. Qualitative research – identifies/explores themes following established methodology.	Designed to answer the question: "Does this service reach a predetermined standard?"	Designed to answer the question: "What standard does this service achieve?"
Addresses clearly defined questions, aims and objectives.	Measures against a standard.	Measures current service without reference to a standard.
Quantitative research -may involve evaluating or comparing interventions, particularly new ones. Qualitative research – usually involves studying how interventions and relationships are experienced.	Involves an intervention in use ONLY. (The choice of treatment is that of the clinician and patient according to guidance, professional standards and/or patient preference.)	Involves an intervention in use ONLY. (The choice of treatment is that of the clinician and patient according to guidance, professional standards and/or patient preference.)

Usually involves collecting data that are additional to those for routine care but may include data collected routinely. May involve treatments, samples or investigations additional to routine care.	Usually involves analysis of existing data but may include administration of simple interview or questionnaire.	Usually involves analysis of existing data but may include administration of simple interview or questionnaire.
Quantitative research - study design may involve allocating patients to intervention groups. Qualitative research uses a clearly defined sampling framework underpinned by conceptual or theoretical justifications.	No allocation to intervention groups: the health care professional and patient have chosen intervention before clinical audit.	No allocation to intervention groups: the health care professional and patient have chosen intervention before service evaluation.
May involve randomisation	No randomisation	No randomisation
ALTHOUGH ANY OF THESE THREE MAY RAISE ETHICAL ISSUES, UNDER CURRENT GUIDANCE:-		
RESEARCH REQUIRES REC REVIEW	AUDIT DOES NOT REQUIRE REC REVIEW	SERVICE EVALUATION DOES NOT REQUIRE REC REVIEW
Beaumont Hospital Ethics (Medical Research) Committee has adapted the above UK position, as follows: -		
RESEARCH REQUIRES REC REVIEW	AUDIT registered with the Clinical Governance Dept. DOES NOT REQUIRE REC REVIEW	SERVICE EVALUATION notified to the Quality & Standards Dept. DOES NOT REQUIRE REC REVIEW
<p>To arrange for REC REVIEW:</p> <p>Gillian Vale Research Ethics Committee Room 12 St. Raphael's Portacabins Lr. Ground Floor Beaumont Hospital 01 809 2680 gvale@rcsi.ie</p>	<p>To register an AUDIT:</p> <p>Helen Ryan Clinical Governance Dept Room 27 St. Raphael's Portacabins Lr. Ground Floor Beaumont Hospital 01 797 4772 helenryan@beaumont.ie</p>	<p>To notify a SERVICE EVALUATION:</p> <p>Susan Moloney Quality & Standards Dept Room 20 St. Raphael's Portacabins Lr. Ground Floor Beaumont Hospital 01 809 2077 susanmoloney@beaumont.ie</p>
http://www.beaumontethics.ie/home/audit_serviceevaluation.htm		