

Benchmarking Progress in Patient Care Through QA, Standards of Care

The School's effectiveness in delivering patient care services is one of six critical areas being targeted for review by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CDA) in the upcoming accreditation process. The accreditation requirements call for establishing standards of care that are "patient-centered, focused on comprehensive care, and written in a format that facilitates assessment with measurable criteria."

Although some of the language is new, the concept of patient-centered care at SDM is not. In the SDM strategic plan, "A Framework for Quality," the School stated its commitment to "further enhance a high-quality, service oriented, faculty-led, patient-driven oral health care delivery system." To help refine strategies to achieve patient care goals, and particularly to facilitate assessment of performance in this area using measurable criteria, the School formally launched a quality assurance (QA) program in January 1999.

Dean Raymond Fonseca calls the QA process "a way to formalize efforts that have been ongoing here for a number of years." He goes on to note that "our clinical faculty have already recognized that establishing and meeting specified standards of patient care is a vital part of assuring patient satisfaction. What we are doing now is building a QA process around these standards."

Dr. Ronald Sarg, SDM's Director of Quality Assurance, also noted that "the standards of care are the skeleton for the whole quality assurance program." According to Dr. Sarg, by "defining the standards to which we hold ourselves accountable—the standards of care provide a quantifiable way to help evaluate the quality of our care, instruction, and service."

Establishing the Baseline

The QA Committee, which includes department chairs and clinical directors as well as administrators, support staff, and student representatives, began meeting in January 1999. Because the standards of care are the foundation of the School's effort to assess its performance in the area of patient care, the first task of the QA Committee was to draft a Standards of Care document. This document defines the standards of care and quality indicators for 12 areas: general standards (including patient care guidelines, examination standards, radiographic standards, patient dental records, management of medical emergencies, and infection and biohazard management and control); anesthesia; endodontics; implant dentistry; medically complex patient care; oral diagnosis/oral medicine; oral and maxillofacial surgery; orthodontics; pediatric dentistry; periodontics; preventive dentistry; and restorative dentistry. The committee members drew upon American Dental Association (ADA) requirements and standards of the profession, as well as guidelines
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Ongoing Quality Assurance Data Collection Sources, Activities

The QA Committee, which meets monthly, maintains the School's ongoing QA program by gathering data from sources throughout the School and using it to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the School's programs and procedures, patient care, service, and operations. Through this process, the QA program enables the School to identify trends, make adjustments as needed, and proactively ensure quality at all levels.

Following is a list of the QA program activities, outlining the data collection sources and the frequency with which the QA Committee reviews these areas.

- Monthly Departmental Review
- Infection Control and Safety
- Emergency Treatment for Patients of Record
- Patient Care Report (involving a review of Patient Outcome Assessments/Retreatments, Dental Laboratory Delays, and Events of the Month)
- SDM Incident Reports
- SDM Occupational Injury Reports
- SDM Patient Complaints
- Quarterly Review
- Clinic Coordinators Report
- Credentials Subcommittee Report
- Needle-stick Injuries
- Patient Post-Case Reviews
- Annual Review
- Predoctoral Clinical Assessment Survey
- Senior Exit Survey
- Patient Satisfaction Survey
- SDM Alumni Survey
- SDM Employer/Director Survey
- Standards of Care and Quality Indicator Review
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QA, Standards of Care

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outlined in SDM's clinic manual and identified by clinic chairs to define the standards of care in each area.

According to Dr. Sarg, the next step involves making this document operational to ensure that the School is meeting or exceeding these standards in terms of both patient care and academics. That process began in April with departments' review of the standards of care for the areas that are applicable to each.

"We are approximately two-thirds of the way through the initial audit of quality indicators for all the departments," notes Dr. Sarg. "Our goal is to complete the baseline survey of the departments by December, so we can reevaluate the program in January and have a more effective program to go forward with in the next calendar year. In this first review, we will see which quality indicators are appropriate and which aren't and make adjustments accordingly."

As members of the QA Committee begin to get feedback on how well the standards of care are being met, they will use this information, along with other data, to identify trends and make recommendations on ways to strengthen the School's programs—from direct patient care to support services and instructional techniques.

"The QA program looks predominantly at clinical issues, but this process also involves the academic side of the house," explains Dr. Sarg. "It involves looking at how the whole system interacts—the domino effect of one action or procedure on another. If we identify a problem on the clinic floor, can we help prevent it by modifying classroom instruction before students enter the clinic?"

Ensuring that the SDM community is well informed about the standards of care and the entire QA program is a priority and essential to its success. Dr. Sarg has already introduced students, staff, and faculty to the Standards of Care document through recent presentations at the faculty/staff retreat and new student orientation. The QA Committee will also be an ongoing source for gathering and giving feedback on the Standards of Care and the QA program.

As Dr. Sarg notes, "The Standards of Care is a living document which will continuously be reviewed and changed with the aim of making improvements for everyone involved—patients, students, educators, and the support staff." He adds that, "Once students, staff, and faculty understand how the standards are evaluated and tracked and take ownership of the entire QA program, we will improve the effectiveness of the quality assurance process." ■

A copy of the Standards of Care document can be obtained by contacting Dr. Sarg at 215-573-3440.

Data Collection *(continued)*

Departments will also be surveyed to assess their performance with respect to relevant quality indicators outlined for each in the Standards of Care document. The baseline survey of all the departments is projected to be completed by December. The standards of care and quality indicators will then be reviewed with each department chairman and clinic director and revised as needed for use in the coming year. This will be an annual, ongoing process with department surveys being completed throughout the year and the standards of care and quality indicators being reevaluated at year's end. ■