Collecting data

Overview

To demonstrate that the changes made in an improvement project result in the predicted positive outcomes, data must be collected, analysed and presented. This section addresses aspects of how data should be collected to support quality improvement.

Why is this relevant to Quality Improvement?

Prior to embarking on collecting data it's important to consider a number of questions:

- Who will collect data? Should be people delivering the relevant care process if possible.
- What data will they collect?
- Where will they collect the data? Good if can be integrated into daily routine of delivering care.
- When will they collect the data? How often does data need to be collected? More frequent collections allow faster demonstration of improvement but small samples are more sensitive to random variation.
- How will the data be recorded? Are IT systems available or will pencil and paper suffice?
- Is there an existing source of data? (Be specific).
- Will we count every event or take a sample? Samples are often sufficient but may need to be random to prevent bias.
- Are there obvious stratifiers? Will we wish to subdivide the data to reflect known differences in processes/models of care (for example by day/night shift, week/weekend)?
- Have we clearly documented the rationale for measures and how we plan to collect data?
- Have we tested the data collection plan?

These questions are based on the approach laid out in Quality Health Care: A Guide to Developing and Using Indicators (see additional resources)

Each of the topics is considered further in the measurement plan framework document. The data collection plan form is a useful way of working through how the data for each of the measures in a project will be collected.
Data collection methods for attitudes and evaluation of staff and patient experience will differ in the sorts of data collection forms they use (including rating scales to transform qualitative opinions into quantitative data). However, many of the general principles of data collection are the same.