

# Identifying opportunities for improvement

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## Overview

Examining data on current systems and outcomes allows identification of where improvement efforts should be targeted.

## Why is this relevant to Quality Improvement?

A variety of approaches are useful to selecting what to work on, and with whom. Selecting where to work is sometime referred to as segmenting the opportunity. Consideration of which areas will most likely give the best [return on investment](#) may determine which areas would be best to start with.

Understanding the performance of current processes by examining them and the outcomes they produce is a useful start:

- Patient and staff stories. Where do patients and staff see problems with the care they receive and provide? What are acknowledged 'shining beacons' of good practice doing to achieve such great results? (Qualitative data)
- Patient and staff surveys. Where do patients and staff report problems? (Qualitative and quantitative data)
- Clinical audits. What gaps, if any, in care are revealed?
- Performance assessments against numeric aims and targets, may show gaps between observed and desired results.
- [Pareto charts](#) can be used to identify which categories (for example wards, CHPs, hospitals, shifts) contain most examples of a defined problem.
- [Box plots](#) can be used to summarise historical variation within and among sites.
- [Statistical process control](#) charts are helpful in understanding variation in processes and indicating whether those processes are stable and capable of delivering acceptable outcomes reliably. They also aid the identification of especially good or bad examples of performance from which lessons could be learned.
- [Demand, Capacity, Activity and Queuing \(DCAQ\)](#) methods are good for identifying places in process/ system where flow is impaired.

Many of these approaches benefit from having baseline data from the service you are considering improving. However, it is not always necessary. Data gathered during initial small scale changes may often be suitable to show a

baseline since the change takes a while to feed through to become visible as an influence on the process performance.

Benchmarking with similar services may also be useful.

In order to consider issues of value, efficiency and cost effectiveness analysis of financial data will be required alongside data on processes and outcomes.

Identifying places where many problems are occurring is not the only thing to consider when deciding where to focus improvement efforts. Attention should also be given to whether there are 'willing workers' in that area who have an interest in improving care in their area.