

ACADEMY OF MEDICAL ROYAL COLLEGES _____

Principles for the conduct and quality assurance of invited reviews

One of the objectives of Royal Colleges is to translate advances in knowledge and technology into evidence-based standards of practice which facilitate high quality, safe care for patients. Although Royal Colleges are not responsible for regulating standards in health care, health care providers may sometimes require external specialty advice in order to make an appropriate response to adverse events, complaints or concerns about standards of clinical practice. Invited reviews can provide an independent, fair and professional perspective where local investigatory mechanisms are felt to lack the necessary expertise or independence.

Some Colleges and Faculties do not currently offer invited reviews because other mechanisms for the provision of external advice in these specialty areas already exist and have stood the test of time.

The following broad principles should be followed when commissioning, conducting and following up invited reviews.

1. The overriding aim of invited reviews is to promote patient safety and to support healthcare organisations to take positive action to improve standards of care where this is required.
2. Where a College believes that a request for an invited review is not likely to be the best way of investigating and resolving a concern, it should assist the enquirer by signposting to more appropriate sources of advice
3. Invited reviews should aim to verify as objectively as possible whether or not a genuine concern exists, and if so, the level of risk it poses to the safety of patients
4. Invited reviews and any recommendations which result from them should reference relevant published standards and guidelines where these exist
5. The invited review mechanism should be promoted as a means of assisting organisations to resolve concerns at an early stage and recommendations should be structured to drive improvement in the quality of the clinical service. If a College invited review is delayed until a situation has become adversarial and other attempts to achieve change have failed, the prospects for a clear resolution diminish.

6. Although College invited reviews normally provide advice on a confidential basis to the organisation that commissions the review, learning points and recommendations should, where possible be structured so that they can be shared within the clinical service to facilitate a team-based approach to quality improvement.
7. If, during the course of an invited review, serious concerns emerge about the safety of patients, or if there is an overriding public duty to do so, the College reserves the right to communicate the findings of the review to the relevant regulatory authority. Colleges will not enter into a legal arrangement which limits their ability to disclose to regulatory authorities any urgent or serious patient safety concerns.
8. Concerns which arise about standards of practice or clinical outcomes may relate to a clinical service as a whole, or may appear to relate to the practice of an individual doctor. Some Colleges may at their discretion agree to accept requests for an invited review of the work of an individual doctor. Other Colleges may only offer an invited review of a clinical service. Either way if an invited review identifies variations in practice or outcomes that fall outside nationally accepted norms, this finding will be notified to the organisation which commissions the review for action.
9. If, during the course of an invited review, concerns emerge about the conduct or health or fitness to practise of a doctor, the College will draw these to the attention of the organisation commissioning the review, so that the appropriate mechanisms for investigating and resolving them can be put into action.
10. Three to six months after the final report has been issued the College will contact the healthcare organisation to discuss the outcome of the review visit and implementation of suggested recommendations. Feedback will also be sought in confidence on the conduct of the review to assist in continuous improvement in service.
11. The College has no statutory authority to require action following a performance or service review and can only give recommendations and advice to a healthcare organisation. Any action taken following a performance or service review is the responsibility of the requesting organisation, but where concerns are raised about patient safety, the College would expect the healthcare organisation to address these in a time scale appropriate to the magnitude of the risk, taking advice from the regulators as appropriate. In the event that the healthcare organisation concerned does not take the College's recommended action within a reasonable timescale, the College concerned will reserve the right to contact the regulator directly.
12. Colleges will maintain records of invited reviews in line with data protection (and other relevant) legislation and following the advice provided to them by their legal advisers as appropriate.