

**SUPPORTING QUALITY
IMPROVEMENT IN
VETERINARY CARE
2020 - 2022**
STRATEGY AND ACTION
PLAN

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Improvement Advisory Board

Strategy and Plan 2020 - 2022

Why QI?

Continuous quality improvement is about adopting systematic, measurable approaches to support and continuously advance efficient, high quality, practice.

Baltaden and Davidoff define quality improvement as “the combined and unceasing efforts of everyone... to make the changes that will lead to better patient outcomes (health), better system performance (care) and better professional development (learning)¹.”

Everyone in a caring profession is driven to deliver consistent, high-quality care. Our biggest challenge has nothing to do with professional motivation or clinical expertise, but with how we can best structure ourselves to continually improve patient care, business efficiency and our working environments.

Although the context for developing quality improvement (QI) in the veterinary professions differs from the NHS – where it has been pursued by various governments in response to well-publicised failures and voters’ concerns about performance gaps² – the underlying reasoning is the same: like any other healthcare system, we are motivated to continuously improve quality and patient safety.

Our research has shown that 96% of the professions believe that QI will improve veterinary care within practice. The following benefits set out what we have learned from quality improvement in other sectors and in the veterinary sector so far.

Benefits of quality improvement

Preventing avoidable harm to patients: in considering if there is a better, safer way for us to deliver care, we can reduce avoidable errors and save lives. When we share, maintain and advance best practice we have a better chance of doing the right thing, the first time round. To make our patients safer, we also need to look after ourselves, and each other.

Improving patient-centred care: quality is about meeting the needs of our patients and clients – we cannot improve our quality until we first understand the needs of the animals in our care and their owners’ expectations and wishes.

Determine better practice: to know where we can improve, we must first understand the level of care that we provide and this inevitably begins with some form of record collection and data analysis. We can then identify what is working well and what is working less well – we can replicate care paths that lead to better outcomes. These processes can encourage good management and maintenance of facilities and equipment, highlight guidelines or protocols that need updating and can reduce wastage, which in turn will help with environmental protection and sustainability.

¹ Baltaden PB, Davidoff F, What is “quality improvement” and how can it transform healthcare? *BMJ Quality & Safety* 2007;**16**:2-3.

² Ham, C, Berwick, D, Dixon, J. (2016). A brief history of policies on quality of care in England. In: Ham, C, Berwick, D, Dixon, J *Improving quality in the English NHS: A strategy for action*. London: The King's Fund. p5-7.

Embedding evidence-based veterinary medicine: quality improvement techniques allow us to incorporate evidence-based veterinary medicine into our busy working schedules. By combining our knowledge sources in a manner that supplements and supports us, we can integrate our daily practises with our wealth of knowledge (combining expertise with the most relevant and best available scientific evidence, patient circumstances and owners' wishes). By streamlining our services for quicker and easier decision-making, we can save time. Efficient practice is more profitable and makes best use of scarce human resource.

Enhancing client compliance: in having an evidence-base to support our recommended diagnosis and treatment plans, we can be confident in how we communicate our recommendations to our clients, allowing us to work together, with our clients, to achieve well-informed, shared decision-making. As well as the benefits this will have for animal care, it has added value in assisting us in the marketing of our services, and in monitoring and improving client concordance, which are key factors in practice sustainability and growth for reinvestment.

Developing a united team: a commitment to improvement by the whole team, supported from board level, dramatically increases buy-in from teams. By establishing and supporting a strategic goal for your organisation to continuously improve the quality of care it provides, practices can stimulate discussions between all team members – it doesn't matter what our roles are, we all have a part to play. With all team members on board, improvements will follow.

Encouraging a healthy working environment – by discussing mistakes supportively and without judgement, with a commitment to openness and understanding rather than discipline and blame, we can safeguard our team against emotional distress caused by errors in an environment which provides support for our team and advocates for the needs of our patients.

Fostering a learning culture: By providing a structure where we can speak openly about our experiences (both positive and negative), we can be constructive about how we improve. Tangible improvements allow us to provide positive feedback to our teams and we can all see the benefits of what we are doing. Areas for further training or CPD may also be highlighted, while quality improvement activities themselves count towards CPD.

Facilitating a more enjoyable career: A great deal of professional satisfaction can be gained from being able to reassure ourselves that we are doing a job well. QI encourages team-work and establishes support networks which can contribute to a more enjoyable career.

Improving communication: By putting systems in place, we can ensure that changes are communicated effectively and consistently amongst the team. By involving all of the team in the process at the start and ensuring everyone knows the results of improvement efforts, we will have a better chance at maintaining engagement and in giving everyone an opportunity to make an impact.

Improving team retention: improving care is about more than just clinical outcomes – we can improve workplace culture by assisting and teaching veterinary teams how to create a safe, supportive and collegiate environment with a positive impact on staff morale and wellbeing.

As full-cycle quality improvement is increasingly established in veterinary healthcare systems, we will be well placed to collect strong evidence about constraints and benefits, possibly working with university researchers and research funders to report on this.

Background

With a mission to advance the quality of veterinary care for the benefit of animals, the public, and society, RCVS Knowledge have dedicated resources to supporting the professions with establishing full-cycle quality improvement.

In 2017, we formed the Quality Improvement Advisory Board, based on their experience, expertise, or engagement in the subject matter, their reach, or if they were representative of the professions. They advise on the strategic direction, provide clinical oversight and champion the campaign.

In 2018, responding to requests from the professions, we launched free resources for the five key QI techniques³. These resources are for busy practice-based veterinary teams to make a start on quality improvement.

In 2019, we commissioned a major research project to establish an evidence-base for a way forward (for us and for others) to support the professions (veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses), and to better understand the current landscape of quality improvement in veterinary practices. This involved a mixed-methods approach involving c. 550 representatives of the veterinary professions.

Key lessons resulting from the research

Though the veterinary professions have made progress in establishing some form of clinical governance, full-cycle, continuous QI is not embedded in day-to-day work across the sector. Current improvement activities are often informal and unrecorded, and it is unclear if changes are monitored to measure their impact and whether the resulting evidence is shared with others.

The evidence to support bringing QI into the veterinary sector is strong, but leadership is needed to make sense of QI and tailor it to the needs of practices. While there is a broadly positive orientation towards QI, there is much less clarity about what it involves in practice. Those new to QI are unclear about the best ways to get involved.

Change should be consistent, prioritised and involve the efficient use of time. There is neither a need, nor an appetite, for a whole new 'improvement architecture'. Innovations need to become embedded and operate for long enough to demonstrate whether or not to abandon, adapt or spread. Time-constraints emerged as the most important barrier, so finding ways that allow easy, visible and quick forms of QI should be prioritised.

Campaign Strategy Statements

The Quality Improvement Campaign supports practice teams to embed continuous quality improvement (QI) techniques for a structured and evidence-based approach to animal care.

The purpose of the campaign is to engage the wider veterinary community in the concepts and delivery of quality improvement, to drive a cultural change that is open to the prospect of analysis, change, and ultimately, improvement.

Over the next two years, the campaign will lead veterinary teams in establishing some harmonised approaches to QI that emphasise collaboration and shared learning to advance the delivery of quality care.

³ Clinical Audit, significant event audit, guidelines, checklists and benchmarking
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Campaign resourcing

The RCVS Knowledge Board of Trustees have overall responsibility to ensure that the work of the charity meets its charitable objectives. The Executive Director provides executive oversight. The Head of Quality Improvement is the campaign lead, alongside RCVS Knowledge's Head of Digital and Communications. The Quality Improvement Advisory Board report to its Chair, with a representative of the RCVS Knowledge Board of Trustees ensuring that the campaign is in line with the charity's overall strategy. The Working Groups report in the Quality Improvement Advisory Board. Budget control and approval is by RCVS Knowledge's Finance and General Purposes Committee. Various members of the professions volunteer their time to support the campaign.

2020 – 2022 Strategic Plan

The following strategic plan is designed to synchronise with the current planning schedule of the overarching RCVS Knowledge Strategy. It responds to the recommendations of the research report *Assessing the Landscape and Future Actions for Quality Improvement in the Veterinary Sector*.

We will apply an element of flexibility to allow us to adapt and improve our approach to respond to the rate of adoption and context of QI in the professions. There is an element of wish list about this plan. This is in part due to relying on volunteers, and in part due to the need for the Communications and Digital team to fulfil the needs of other areas of work for RCVS Knowledge. It should be noted that projects of this scale have taken considerable education, commitment and resources to achieve within the NHS, although this should not be a deterrent, but an opportunity to learn.

In addition to the activity set out in the following plan, the regular meetings to enable the Quality Improvement Advisory Board meetings and horizon scanning to take place will continue at the rate of 1 to 2 meetings per year with additional electronic communications.

The recommendations report includes further suggestions for the medium to long term future, and suggestions where current solutions can be taken further. These will be considered during the next planning cycle. Recommendations were also made for action by other stakeholders. These should be taken forward to the annual Summit.

Theme	Recommendation	2020 - 2021 Activity	2021 - 2022 Activity
Accumulate solid evidence and prioritise efforts accordingly	Sequentially develop clinical audits using apps or other types of technology and interfaces	Introduce the Canine Cruciate Registry Develop the Equine AMR Audit	Introduce the Equine AMR Audit
	Promote the results of case examples when evidence for the effects of Quality Improvement are learned.	Ongoing promotion	Ongoing promotion
Deliver leadership and engagement to make sense of QI to stakeholders and explain what it means in practice	Set up a collaborative event between RCVS and RCVS Knowledge drawing on current synergies between QI and Leadership to extract and translate key lessons from human health.	Proposal currently with RCVS	
	Establish an improvement community.	The National Summit for Supporting Quality Improvement in Veterinary Care	The National Summit for Supporting Quality Improvement in Veterinary Care
	Promote case examples of QI in practice	When case examples are submitted	When case examples are submitted
	Deliver recorded simulation training to illustrate the links between leadership and quality improvement in practice.	Collaboration with the Animal Health Trust Collaboration with Vets Now Manchester	
	Develop a brand and communications strategy for QI with simple, direct language	Brand and communications strategy designed and delivered.	Brand and communications strategy delivered.
	Define key terms for continuous QI and its related themes	Delphi Study	
Reshape existing activities and organisations to make QI as easy as possible; evolution not revolution	Repeat the RCVS Knowledge Champion Awards to celebrate success and demonstrate to others what “good QI” looks like.	RCVS Knowledge Champions 2020	RCVS Knowledge Champions 2021
	Increase the visibility of RCVS Knowledge QI products including toolkits and standardised documents; embedding QI in CPD	In progress – to continue in line with brand and communications strategy.	Continue

	Build on current experience to extend the role of clinical audit	Further development and reporting of The National Audit for Small Animal Neutering	Further development and reporting of The National Audit for Small Animal Neutering and the Canine Cruciate Registry
	Establish communication around QI across practices	Build progress reports into the National Summit. Pursue annual attendance at the Major Employers Group. Encourage site-visits amongst beacon practices.	Build progress reports into the National Summit. Pursue annual attendance at the Major Employers Group. Encourage site-visits amongst beacon practices.
	Lead discussions between under- and post-graduate educators to provide a consistent, prioritised approach to teaching the principles of quality improvement and the associated themes of communication, team-work and team-morale, patient safety, and leadership.	Sub-group of QIAB to take this forward and pursue collaboration, to identify what is already being done, and agree best practice.	Sub-group of QIAB to take this forward and pursue collaboration, to identify what is already being done, and agree best practice.
Pursue consistent, prioritised and sequenced activities in a stable improvement landscape	Establish Working Parties to focus on improvement challenges and interventions	Care bundle	Care bundle
	Encourage improvement approaches that are delivered continuously rather than one-off 'heroic' interventions	The ongoing work of the 2019 and 2020 Award winners (role models)	The ongoing work of the 2019, 2020 and 2021 Award winners (role models)
	Promote resources and routes to QI that are time-bound, routinised and scalable.	Promote "easy wins"	Run a time-bound campaign
	Demonstrate fidelity to the 5 key QI techniques and how they work together to close the loop for full-cycle quality improvement.	Upskill leading influencers and use their new skills to translate further relevant resources from other safety critical industries. Development of current resources.	Upskill leading influencers and use their new skills to translate further relevant resources from other safety critical industries. Development of current resources.
	Establish a balance between e-enabled activities and face-to-face activities	Continue and expand on streams at congress' and roadshows. Continue with webinars, podcasts and simulation training.	Take a measured approach to continuing previous levels of involvement.



RCVS Knowledge's mission is to advance the quality of veterinary care for the benefit of animals, the public, and society. RCVS Knowledge champions the use of evidence-based veterinary medicine in veterinary practice.

We support the thousands of dedicated veterinary professionals in delivering high-quality evidence-based veterinary medicine to the millions of animals in their care, through our peer-reviewed journal, library, quality improvement activities and historical collections. We are the charity partner of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

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