



THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

Standards for General Practice

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Aim

Standards aim to provide explicit guidance for general practitioners, their staff and the community about how to improve quality of care for the practice population through the structure, policy and organisation of general practices.

Principles

1. The quality of health care is not solely due to individual doctors' performance but depends also on the design of the health system in which they work. The structure and organisation of the actual practice affects quality of care.
2. Standards for general practices should be based on evidence of improved health outcomes. In the absence of such evidence, systematic processes to develop consensus provide an adequate basis for the development of standards.

Background

In 1991, the General Practice Consultative Committee (comprising representatives of the AMA, RACGP and the Commonwealth Government) released a discussion paper *The Future of General Practice: A Strategy for the Nineties and Beyond*.

This proposed "that an independent and voluntary system of practice accreditation be developed to enhance the delivery of services and facilities by general practices through a process of continuing quality improvement".

The RACGP was acknowledged as the appropriate body to develop standards for any accreditation process. As a consequence, the College established the Standards Reference Group, which consulted widely on successive drafts of Standards for General Practices and validated them in a national field test. Many practices also gained experience of the Standards in Government Demonstration Trials conducted through Divisions of General Practice in 1994 (some 700 practices).

In late 1995 the RACGP established the Practice Standards Committee of Council to oversee ongoing development, maintenance and application of practice standards.

The *1996 Entry Standards for General Practices* are national standards which can reasonably be expected of General Practice throughout Australia. The RACGP acknowledges the need for widespread consultation to look beyond Entry Standards to foster a true process of continuous improvement in quality.

Standards for any aspect of care need to be both useable and valid. Recent research has analysed the effectiveness of guidelines for clinical practices.

It identifies principles which enhance the useability and validity of guidelines.¹

The National Health and Medical Research Council has developed guidelines on how best to achieve this in the area of clinical practice guidelines.² Their principles should also apply to Standards for General Practices.

Position of the RACGP

The RACGP has an important role to:

- Develop and maintain standards which address the key features of general practice - the "provision of primary, comprehensive and continuing whole patient care to individuals, families and their community"
- Establish mechanisms by which general practitioners have access to effective activities for improving quality of patient care
- Demonstrate the professional accountability of General Practice to the community.

Objectives

1. To undertake regular revision of the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices to ensure they remain current, valid and reflect community and professional expectations.
2. To encourage general practitioners to use and apply the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices in their practices.
3. To help design and advance a system of accreditation for Australian general practices to promote the use and application of the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices.

4. To develop a process of continuous quality improvement for general practices, beyond the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices through development of optimum standards.
5. To evaluate the contribution that standards make to the quality of patient care for General Practice.
6. To ensure the RACGP remains the arbiter of standards for General Practice.

Strategies

1.
 1. Undertake systematic and regular consultation with major stakeholders to review and analyse feedback on the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices.
 2. Review data arising from use of the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices.
 3. Review research evidence about the impact of the organisation and structure of general practices on quality of patient care.
 4. Liaise with other organisations which develop standards relevant to General Practice to ensure consistency with the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices.
2.
 1. Publicise and distribute the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices to all general practitioners.
 2. Help general practitioners, practice managers and others understand the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices through provision of educational materials, manuals, seminars etc.
 3. Promote use of the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices through undergraduate and postgraduate medical training; and through the RACGP Training Program, Practice Management activities and Quality Assurance & Continuing Education Program.
3.
 1. Participate with general practitioner organisations and other stakeholders to develop and maintain an accreditation system acceptable to the profession.
4.
 1. Research concepts of continuous quality improvement in health and other industries to identify ways to apply these concepts in general practices.
 2. Explore options for continuous improvement processes for general practices in consultation with major stakeholders.

5.
 1. Collect and analyse data from the ongoing use of the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices to determine their effect on General Practice and their effectiveness in improving quality of patient care.
 2. Review research evidence about the impact and outcomes of application of the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices.

6.
 1. Demonstrate the role, achievements and legitimacy of the RACGP in the area of standards development and evaluation.
 2. Ensure that the RACGP Entry Standards for General Practices are appropriately constituted by liaison with the community, the profession and other groups involved in quality of patient care.
 3. Be an expert resource for queries about standards in General Practice.

References

1. Grimshaw, J. & Russell, I. T. (1994) Achieving health gain through clinical guidelines II: Ensuring guidelines change medical practice. *Quality in Health Care*, 3: pp45-52
2. National Health and Medical Research Council, (1995). *Guidelines for the Development of Clinical Practice Guidelines*. Australian Government Publishing Service.

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