General Dental Services: Quality Improvement (Research) Activities

Background

Under the terms of the NHS (General Dental Services) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2017\(^1\), all dentists on an NHS Health Board ‘dental list’ are required to undertake at least 15 hours of quality improvement (QI) activities during each ‘relevant’ three-year QI period\(^2\).

The 2017 Amendment Regulations define QI as “...the systematic, critical and reflective analysis of the quality of dental care provided by the dentist, and of any changes made by the dentist to bring about improvement in quality of care, patient experience, patient safety and clinical effectiveness, (including the processes used by that dentist for diagnosis, intervention and treatment and use of resources)”. Under the amended regulations participation in practice-based research that explores the quality of dental care can count towards dentists’ QI activity requirements. Within each three-year QI period, participation in approved QI (Research) activities will be eligible for up to five hours credit\(^3\). General Dental Practitioners can claim QI Allowance in respect of their QI (Research) hours.

Eligible QI (Research) Activity

NHS Scotland’s 2010 Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHS Scotland aims to deliver the highest quality healthcare services to Scotland’s population supported by the three Healthcare Quality Ambitions: person-centred, effective, safe care. These quality ambitions provide the focus for NHS Scotland’s Healthcare Quality Strategy and are based on the US Institute of Medicine’s (IoM’s) six quality dimensions.\(^4\) Eligible QI (Research) activities will address questions that inform and support the delivery of the three quality ambitions for dentistry in Scotland. Four broad categories of research are eligible.

- **Category A**: Rapid Evaluation Practitioner\(^5\) practice-based dental research projects conducted by the Scottish Dental Practice Based Research Network (SDPBRN);
- **Category B**: Practice-based dental research projects conducted by Higher Education Institutions or NHS Health Boards;
- **Category C**: Practice-based dental research projects that were awarded research funding through a process of open competition including high quality peer review;
- **Category D**: National, practice-based, dental quality improvement initiatives that include a reflective research component.

Within these categories, a research project will be eligible if it addresses a clearly focused question that investigates the quality of dental care and includes primary or secondary outcomes directly relating to the question. Based on the IoM quality dimensions, eligible research projects will investigate questions

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2. See NHS (General Dental Services) (Scotland) Regulations 2010 Part IV 40 (5) for proportionate arrangements when a dentist joins a Health Board list after the first day of a ‘relevant’ period.
3. Vocational Dental Practitioners (VDPs) are required to participate in a QI project which their VT Adviser will review, approve, sign off and certify. This is the only QI activity VDPs can be credited with during their VT year, and it is not possible to award VDPs QI (Research) hours.
5. Rapid Evaluation Practitioners (REPs) are dentists with an interest in research who have been recruited by SDPBRN to participate in a range of research studies including studies that inform the development of and evaluate quality improvement initiatives for general dental practice. REPs commit to four projects each year.
focusing on the safety, effectiveness, person-centeredness, timeliness, efficiency or equity of dental care. This will include research that aims to generate evidence to develop and inform the evidence base, as well as research that aims to evaluate and implement high quality delivery of evidence based dental care.

Administration
All QI (Research) hours will be administered by SDPBRN via the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) Portal. To support the efficient implementation of the administrative processes, eligible activities will be adopted onto the SDPBRN QI (Research) Portfolio.

Project Eligibility for Adoption to the SDPBRN QI (Research) Portfolio
To be eligible for inclusion in the SDPBRN QI (Research) Portfolio, research projects in each of the four broad research categories must:

- be practice-based;
- investigate the quality of dental care;
- be conducted in accordance with the UK Policy for Health and Social Care Research (2017). This includes:
  - all necessary approvals including: ethical review; NHS approval for R&D; research passports; Caldicott Guardian approval etc. secured;
  - appropriate peer review;
  - sufficient funding in place for completion of the study;
  - appropriate and transparent dissemination plans;
- include a component to enable dentists to reflect on the quality of the dental care they provide and to develop and take forward action plans as required.

For each project, the number of hours available will be agreed in advance with SDPBRN.

Application for adoption of a project onto the SDPBRN QI (Research) Portfolio should be made by the Chief Investigator using the application form available at www.sdpbrn.org.uk no later than six weeks before commencement of the project. Public access to the portfolio will be available at www.sdpbrn.org.uk.

Supporting dentists to apply for QI hours for participation in research
Chief Investigators will provide information during recruitment informing potential participants that the project has been credited with QI (Research) hours, the number of hours credited and the reflective activities that are required for hours to be claimed.

Dentists will be added to the QI (Research) project on the NES Portal by SDPBRN once they have completed their participation in the research project. For QI (Research) hours to be claimed dentists must upload their reflective report / action plans no more than one month after completion of their involvement in the research project. Templates appropriate to each project will be provided by the research team for these reflective documents. All reports / action plans will be reviewed by SDPBRN in order to evaluate their completeness and dentists’ compliance with QI (Research) requirements.

Further Information
For further information, please contact: SDPBRN: Email sdpbrn@nes.scot.nhs.uk; Telephone 01382 740912.