

Clinical supervision

The primary function of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is to 'protect the public' by setting professional standards and giving advice and guidance to registered nurses, midwives and specialist community public health nurses (registrants).

The NMC code of professional conduct: standards for conduct, performance and ethics (the Code) is designed either to be used on its own or in conjunction with other NMC guidelines. When used with these other guidelines, the Code is an effective tool that leads to a much greater understanding of the principles of providing nursing and midwifery care.

Registrants have a responsibility to deliver safe and effective care based on current evidence, best practice, and where applicable, validated research.

The NHS Management Executive defined clinical supervision in 1993 as:

"...a formal process of professional support and learning which enables individual practitioners to develop knowledge and competence, assume responsibility for their own practice and enhance consumer protection and safety of care in complex situations."

Essentially, clinical supervision allows a registrant to receive professional supervision in the workplace by a skilled supervisor. It allows registrants to develop their skills and knowledge and helps them to improve patient/client care. Clinical supervision enables registrants to:

- * Identify solutions to problems
- * Increase understanding of professional issues
- * Improve standards of patient care
- * Further develop their skills and knowledge
- * Enhance their understanding of their own practice.

Clinical supervision should be available to registrants throughout their careers so they can constantly evaluate and improve their contribution to patient/client care. Along with the NMC's PREP (continuing professional development) standard, clinical supervision is an important part of clinical governance. It directly relates to registered nurses. Midwives have their own statutory system of local supervision. Further information about this is published in the *Midwives rules and standards*.

The NMC supports the principle of clinical supervision but believes that it is best developed at a local level in accordance with local needs. We do not, therefore, advocate any particular model of clinical supervision and we do not provide detailed guidance about its nature and scope. Instead, the NMC has defined a set of principles, which we believe should underpin any system of clinical supervision that is used.

The principles are:

- * Clinical supervision supports practice, enabling registrants to maintain and improve standards of care
- * Clinical supervision is a practice-focused professional relationship, involving a practitioner reflecting on practice guided by a skilled supervisor
- * Registrants and managers should develop the process of clinical supervision according to local circumstances. Ground rules should be agreed so that the supervisor and the registrant approach clinical supervision openly, confidently and are aware of what is involved

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- * Every registrant should have access to clinical supervision and each supervisor should supervise a realistic number of practitioners
- * Preparation for supervisors should be flexible and sensitive to local circumstances. The principles and relevance of clinical supervision should be included in pre-registration and post-registration education programmes
- * Evaluation of clinical supervision is needed to assess how it influences care and practice standards. Evaluation systems should be determined locally.

The NMC supports the establishment of clinical supervision as an important part of clinical governance and in the interests of maintaining and improving standards of patient/client care.

It is advised that local policies should be developed or amended using the information outlined above. Information on updated advice sheets will be published in NMC News.

Further information

The NMC code of professional conduct: standards for conduct, performance and ethics (2004)

NMC advice sheet on Accountability

NMC PREP handbook (2004)

NMC Standards for the preparation of teachers of nurses, midwives and specialist community public health nurses (2004) - *this will be replaced in 2006 by the NMC Standards for supporting learning and assessment in practice*

Department of Health (England) www.dh.gov.uk

The Scottish Executive www.scotland.gov.uk

The Welsh Assembly www.wales.gov.uk

Department of Health and Social Services and Patient Safety of Northern Ireland www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

Health and Personal Social Services in Northern Ireland www.n-i.nhs.uk

Community and District Nurses Association www.cdna-online.org.uk

Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association www.amicus-cphva.org

Royal College of Nursing www.rcn.org.uk

Royal College of Midwives www.rcm.org.uk

UNISON www.unison.org.uk

Last updated March 2006

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