

Quality in distance learning

Winner: Best Online Distance Learning Programme 2014.

The online platform for BMJ Quality provides the framework, learning modules, resources and tools to support individual and team health improvement projects that make healthcare better for their patients. Projects are published, showcased and shared through the BMJ Quality Improvement Journal.

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BMJ Quality



e-learning awards 2014
10 years of rewarding excellence

Introduction - The business challenge

Healthcare professionals at the front line are often unsure of their role in improving quality and how to influence change. Quality improvement is gradually becoming part of the training and on-going assessment for healthcare professionals. This means that increasingly doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals worldwide will be required to engage with activities and projects that improve healthcare quality and safety, and make a real difference to patients.

However, there are massive gaps and inconsistencies in standards, training, activity levels and outcomes. Many managers are primarily concerned with efficiencies, providing value and reducing costs. Clinicians and other healthcare professionals have very little knowledge or expertise in this field which makes quality improvement a complex challenge for healthcare internationally. Frontline staff, such as hospital porters or catering managers, and even patients themselves can often have the biggest impact on quality improvement, but have seldom been influential before this innovative approach from the BMJ.

The BMJ has been an important vehicle for sharing knowledge and best practice amongst healthcare professionals, but the time and rigours of the publishing process meant that smaller or less 'academic' quality improvement projects often go unfinished, unrecorded or are done in isolation.

The learning solution

To address this issue, the BMJ developed a flexible and comprehensive programme to support those undertaking healthcare quality improvement projects – often for the first time. Project teams are helped to *select* a project, guided through the *process*, and encouraged to *complete* and *write up* their project. Learning, mentoring and opportunities for collaboration and publication are all combined in the BMJ programme, with hundreds of projects completed to date in hospitals and healthcare centres up and down the country, raising the quality of patient care and hospital practice.

The BMJ Quality Improvement Reports journal aims to publish a high volume of quality improvement reports to help healthcare professionals document and share innovations and excellence in care. Recent projects include:

- Four simple ward-based initiatives to reduce unnecessary in-hospital patient stay
- Reducing hospital acquired pressure ulcers in intensive care
- Epilepsy emergency rescue training
- Improving the management of acute pancreatitis



Five core needs identified

1. Help identify area for improvement
2. Find out how others have solved it – and what didn't work
3. Support step-by-step through the improvement process
4. Get advice from mentors, experts and the global community
5. Publish and share your work

Two types of programme are offered:

BMJ Quality 'Essentials' offers:

- > A step-by-step framework for making improvements to clinical practice
- > The opportunity to connect with other users and work collaboratively

- > An option to appoint a clinical mentor to specific projects
- > Access to exclusive BMJ Learning modules, tools and webinars which will help users with their project and contribute to their continuing professional development
- > The ability to publish completed projects in the online, open access BMJ Quality Improvement Reports journal
- > Access to a global improvement community through the 'My Community' area.

BMJ Quality Premium offers access to a pre-written library of Quality Improvement Project Guides (QIPs). These projects are designed and peer reviewed by world-renowned subject experts. This enables users to confidently start and implement their quality improvement goals straight away. They are also ideal for those who want to engage in healthcare improvement but have difficulty in defining a project. Projects cover topics as diverse as palliative care for dementia patients, management of acute pain in children and smoking cessation. Many of the premium modules also lead to accreditation.

Supporting learners

In addition to relevant certificated learning modules from BMJ Learning, learners have access to a range of specific guidance and resources such as letter templates, presentations and to enable the design and implementation of effective change cycles. The platform also provides the latest evidence and guidelines, together with case examples, videos, articles and useful tools to help them on their improvement journey.

Learners also have access to healthcare improvement and clinical experts that can help them through mentoring, webinars and the online community.

They also receive valuable feedback from peer reviewers/editors on their submissions to the journal.

Encouraging collaboration

The BMJ Quality platform facilitates collaboration on projects in a number of ways:

- > The addition of team members to any projects. These members have editing rights and are acknowledged as authors in the final publication.
- > Project owners can add a mentor. This can be a volunteer mentor or one of their own choosing. This mentor has read only access to the project.
- > Use of a messaging system which is exclusive to that project. Team members and mentors can discuss the project and contact members from anywhere in the world.
- > Users can connect with other users from across the world via an online community area.
- > Users can work across multiple projects with different team members simultaneously.

Sharing project findings through formal publication

Users are supported by online workbooks to help them write up their work following good practice guidelines as excellent, usable articles so that findings may be easily discovered and widely disseminated.

Once users have completed a project, they can submit it to be considered for publication in BMJ Quality Improvement Reports journal (qir.bmj.com). The platform uses algorithms to automate the presentation of project work into a journal article format which can be submitted for consideration in the journal with a single click.

This journal is an online, open access, peer reviewed journal of global improvement evidence. It has an international readership and aims to help improve healthcare worldwide by building the largest repository of quality improvement projects which are freely available. The journal is indexed by PubMed as an indication of its quality and to ensure that the project findings can be easily found and cited by the wider medical community.

Gathering feedback from the learners

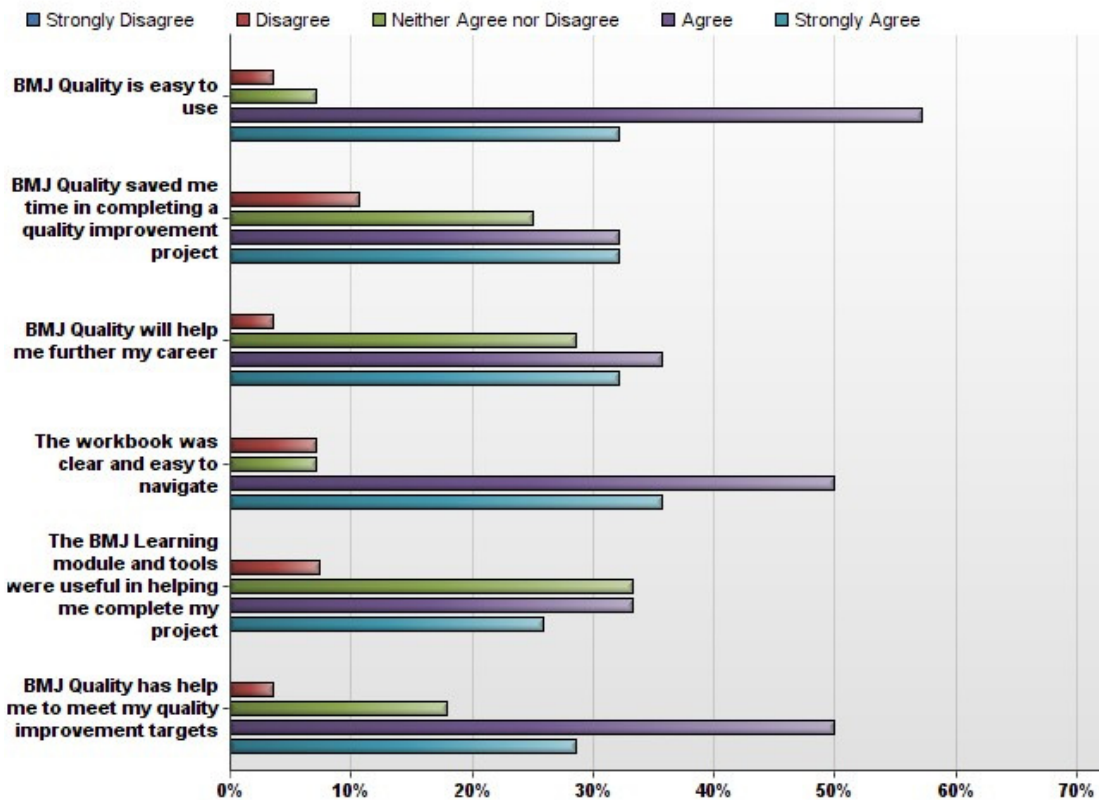
Project owners complete a feedback questionnaire at the end of their project and the results have been very positive. Users report many benefits from BMJ Quality, quite apart from helping them to achieve quality improvement targets.

“The system is easy to use and the journal is an obvious place to publish quality improvement projects - before this, it was difficult to know which sorts of journals would accept research/projects like this for publication, which meant there was less incentive to become involved in such work. Now, with the clear goal of publication in a BMJ journal, there is much more incentive.”

“I find the articles interesting, informative and inspiring.”

“It has given me the confidence in writing up manuscripts for publication. It has also made me understand the aims of good audits and ways to improve health care.”

“It provided a goal for our project and pushed us further.”



Lessons learned

The platform and its services needed to be kept flexible enough to meet the diverse and changing needs of its users. BMJ Quality are constantly developing the platform and its design based on user feedback and customer needs. The recent introduction of face-to-face induction training for large groups was one such development.

At an organisational level, managers recommended the need to be able to customise the platform for their own audiences and access reports to monitor project – and user – progress.

Recognising achievement and delivering results

Delivering measurable quality improvement in healthcare is the primary goal and this is demonstrated in nearly every project. Over 90% of projects submitted, reach the stage of publication.

The value of the programme is evident in a number of ways:

- > For the individual user, there is an online portfolio to track CPD/CME credits that have been earned.

- > For the project, teams measure the baseline of what they are going to improve, make an intervention, and then re-measure. Where the improvement can be quantified (e.g. reduction in hospital admissions, bed stays, reducing infections etc.), there is a calculator tool and other guidance.
- > For BMJ Quality, feedback from users, their mentors and report readers is very positive.

Project reach further underlines the tangible programme benefits:

- > - Over 220 projects have been published, with a further 1000+ projects under way
- > - Users from over 20 countries, and rising
- > - Over 115 quality improvement mentors
- > - Improvement reports have been accessed over 180,000 times

Top tips for large scale online distance learning

- > Involve the end users in the design – ask for their feedback and be prepared to act on it
- > In return, provide expert or peer feedback to these users to increase the value of the programme to them
- > Keep the platform flexible enough to respond to diverse needs
- > Support a collaborative approach to learning – BMJ learners could work in local teams – or could pull a new project team together from hospitals around the world that shared a common challenge
- > Seek contributions to the resource content from renowned and respected subject matter experts that add quality and kudos to the programme
- > Invite your key subject matter experts to contribute to the internal community
- > Reward individuals for taking part – for example through certification, badges or CPD points.
- > Gather and publish feedback as part of a cycle of continuous improvement – including all the various stakeholders in the process

This case study has been independently investigated and developed by Towards Maturity as part of our [Good practice Partnership with e.Learning Age and the e.Learning Awards](#). It was first published in [e.Learning age Magazine](#) in September 2015