

Quality Initiative or Research?

Research	Quality Initiative
Requires research ethics committee approval*	Does not require ethical approval, though should be consistent with ethical principles
Answers a question to advance general knowledge or understanding (based on an idea or theory or previous research). Research is a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalisable knowledge	Aims to confirm or improve a practice or process within a particular unit/service/hospital. Often measured against pre-set standards or benchmarks. Quality initiatives are systematic, data-guided activities, designed to bring about improvements in health care delivery in particular settings
Findings contribute to general knowledge outside of the health care unit/service/hospital	Findings contribute to improvements in the health care unit/service/hospital
Follows a research design (e.g. randomised controlled trial – RCT; a longitudinal prospective cohort study; a retrospective case series of more than two individuals; a controlled interrupted time-series implementation research study)	Follows a quality improvement method (eg. <i>plan, do, study, act [PDSA]</i> cycle; Lean/Six sigma; performance benchmarking; clinical audit; root cause analysis; process mapping)
Sampling and recruitment from the population using specific methods to reduce selection bias	Usually involves all or most people who participate in the quality improvement process
May deviate from routine practice or use a control or placebo	May assess what is normally expected as routine clinical practice
May investigate untested methods or standards	May evaluate implementation of established evidence-based standards or new innovative models of care
Findings of the study are not limited to change to local practice	Results are typically evaluated by an internal committee/unit/service/hospital. These changes may be incorporated in clinical practice and monitored to improve services
May be externally or internally driven. Researcher may be independent from the health care team	Is usually internally driven by the health care team
Publication in peer reviewed scientific journal is typical	Evidence of exemption from ethical review is not a requirement for most journals
Research projects have a distinct start and finish	Quality initiatives tend to be a continuous cycle
Participants' personal information may be used for a purpose other than the purpose for which it was collected, subject to relevant approvals	Quality improvement is an accepted process to improve health care, so for those involved, confidentiality is implicit

* [The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#) (paragraphs 5.1.22 and 5.1.23) defines research that can be exempted from ethics review as negligible risk research that involves the use of existing collections of data or records that contain only non-identifiable data about human beings (e.g. systemic reviews, studies using data publicly available)