

FACT SHEET 9: MANAGING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST IN ACCREDITATION

AHSSQA Scheme

The Commission is responsible under the National Health Reform Act 2011 for the formulation of standards relating to health care safety and quality matters and for formulating and coordinating the Australian Health Service Safety and Quality Accreditation (AHSSQA) Scheme (the Scheme).

The Commission has undertaken a comprehensive review of the Scheme and produced a series of fact sheets to outline the changes to accreditation processes for health service organisations.

NSQHS Standards (second edition)

The National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards were developed by the Commission in collaboration with the Australian Government, states and territories, the private sector, clinical experts, patients and carers. The primary aims of the NSQHS Standards are to protect the public from harm and to improve the quality of health service provision. They provide a quality-assurance mechanism that tests whether relevant systems are in place to ensure expected standards of safety and quality are met.

Health service organisations will transition to the second edition of the NSQHS Standards from January 2019.

The Commission is introducing a range of strategies to reduce potential and real conflicts of interest that are associated with accreditation processes.

Safety and quality consultants not to participate in assessments

Health service organisations may engage safety and quality consultants to help them prepare for assessment to the NSQHS Standards. These consultants sometimes participate in assessments and respond to enquiries from assessors. Often in these situations, the safety and quality consultant is the only representative of the health service organisation able to answer assessors' questions in detail.

Therefore, from January 2019, safety and quality consultants engaged by a health service organisation to prepare the organisation for an assessment, are not permitted to attend or participate in the assessment process for the NSQHS Standards.

A safety and quality consultant is a person who meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Is not identified on the organisational chart
- Is not an employee
- Has no delegated safety and quality responsibilities or accountabilities within the organisation

- Has no line management responsibilities in the organisation
- Does not provide regular and ongoing technical support for the delivery of patient care.

This strategy is specifically aimed at consultants whose work in an organisation is primarily to achieve accreditation, who do not provide or support direct patient care and who do not have as a primary part of their role the transfer of expert knowledge and/or skill to the organisation's workforce.

This requirement does not apply to consultants who may be engaged by health service organisations to support clinical care, or provide ongoing technical advice and expertise. Consultants providing or supporting clinical services will have a contract for services that specifies the safety and quality requirements of their role and ensures the services provided align with the NSQHS Standards. These consultants may perform services such as:

- Providing expert technical advice and support for clinical care (for example, in pharmacy or infection control)
- Providing organisational training and knowledge transfer on safety and quality matters
- Supporting safety and quality improvements.

Nor does this requirement apply to operations staff from a corporate office, or employees with designated roles and responsibilities related to the organisation.

Accrediting agencies are required to notify health service organisations of these requirements before commencing an assessment.

Accrediting agencies consulting on safety and quality

A known conflict of interest exists in situations where an accrediting agency or assessor both support a health service organisation to implement standards, and then assess them against those standards.

To reduce the likelihood of this conflict of interest occurring, accrediting agencies are to:

- Have in place processes to ensure assessors who also provide safety and quality consulting services do not review organisations where they have consulted
- Provide the Commission with information on how they manage conflicts of interest occurring when assessors provide consulting services on the NSQHS Standards and assess to the NSQHS Standards.

Accrediting agencies must ensure that there is no conflict of interest, or bias, on the part of the Agency or its assessors in conducting assessments and awarding accreditation. Any conflict of interest must be immediately acknowledged and addressed by the accrediting agency.

Assessors

When an assessor reviews an organisation over multiple accreditation cycles, they can lose their capacity to be objective. Therefore lead assessors and assessor team members may assess the same organisation for a maximum of two consecutive cycles before they are required to have an absence of at least one cycle.

Contractor funding

Accrediting agencies will no longer be able to contract assessors on fixed fee-for-service arrangements. This funding arrangement discourages assessors rating actions as not met if they are responsible for funding the return visit for reassessment of these actions from their contracted fee.

Further information

nationalstandards.safetyandquality.gov.au

www.safetyandquality.gov.au

The Advice Centre provides support on implementing the NSQHS Standards for health service organisations, surveyors and accrediting agencies.

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