

Patient outcomes paramount

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I must admit to having been slightly taken aback initially by the title of Gale's paper until I realised that the author was not so much deprecating a health outcomes approach, but rather the 'traditional' approach with which she assumes we all can readily identify.

For someone like myself who does not work directly in the quality health care field, it is far from clear that there is an obvious 'traditional' versus 'contemporary' approach. Rather, the discipline seems to be still very much an evolving one, despite the writings of the ancient gurus such as Donabedian and others.

The subject is currently of high interest in Australia and will remain so for many a decade as health administrators do their darnedest to make hospital care, in particular, as safe as possible for patients.

The author rightly points to the need for existing quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that feedback loops are closed and that all players in the health care game, particularly clinicians, are intimately involved in the implementation and evaluation of such mechanisms. But surely patient outcomes must remain the paramount measure. The adoption of the type of quality management system exemplified by the ISO 9002 approach may well be the answer to many of our dreams for better health care and the Campbelltown Health Service deserves our thanks and congratulations for their initiative in giving the system a try.

We look forward to the sequel to this paper, which should tell us precisely the sorts of improved patient care outcomes achieved and at what cost, plus an idea of the long-term acceptability to all concerned.

If the current enthusiasm for this new approach is also translated into effective results over several years, then this will be progress indeed.