Standard Work in the NHS - Description/Discussion

Getting the terminology right is so important in this area. Each team has a certain amount of work to do each day they turn up for work. That work is made up of a number of processes. Each process is made up of a number of tasks. Some/most of those tasks will require a procedure to be produced that describes the task so that all interested parties can understand the task. The documentation that describes the process, tasks and procedures is the package that we call standard work for that particular process. This is 'work as done' and not 'work as perceived'.

The process designer must ensure that the standard work is compliant with organization policy, regulation, etc.

**Some definitions will be useful at this point:**

A Policy is a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes. A policy is a statement of intent. A plan of action adopted or pursued by an individual, government, party, business, etc.

A protocol, in an NHS context, is basically a set of rules covering specific activities or work areas.

A Process is a set of activities that interact to achieve a result. A series of actions which produce a change or development, i.e. the work that we do.

A Procedure is a set of instructions or recipes, a set of commands that show how to achieve some result, such as to prepare or make something. A way of acting or progressing, an established method.

A Work Instruction is a document that provides specific instructions to carry out an Activity. A step by step guide to perform a single instruction.

A Work Instruction contains more detail than a Procedure and is only created if detailed step-by-step instructions are needed.

All the above documents should be produced in text format with illustrations, e.g. flowcharts, as necessary to help understanding, as stand alone documents, and made available to relevant staff. Processes and their associated documents should be reviewed on a regular basis and subject to continuous improvement. Printed format is not necessary as documents can be made available via an intranet or internet.

See here for further definitions:

<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/861/Wipp%20Using%20Protocols%2Cstandards%2C%20policies%20and%20guidelines.pdf>

The terms protocol, standard, policy, guideline, process, procedure, and work instruction are often used interchangeably (and incorrectly) in the NHS although each has a different purpose. However, these are all different document types and to use them effectively you need to be clear about their definitions and content and use the relevant terminology to head documents.

Standard work is perceived, almost universally, as a form of control. How can this be the case if the design process is undertaken correctly, that is that it is designed and continually improved by the people that do the work? Standard work is empowerment to innovate for an innovative workforce.

**Work Processes in the NHS**

Work processes can be divided into two broad sets. These are product or service realization processes and business processes. These two sets are defined as follows:

**Product or Service realisation process set:**

Here are three examples of clinical service realisation processes. It should be noted that most of them are procedures or guidance and not processes as defined above. Each procedure/guidance illustrated will be part of a particular process.

1. The Royal Marsden Hospital Manual of Clinical Nursing Procedures, Ninth Edition

Evidence-based clinical skills and procedures related to essential aspects of a patient's care.

See: <https://www.rmmonline.co.uk/contents/procedures>

2. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Guidance

NICE's role is to improve outcomes for people using the NHS and other public health and social care services. They do this by:

* Producing [evidence-based guidance](https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/our-programmes/nice-guidance) and [advice](https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/our-programmes/nice-advice) for health, public health and social care practitioners.
* Developing [quality standards and performance metrics](https://www.nice.org.uk/standards-and-indicators) for those providing and commissioning health, public health and social care services.
* Providing a [range of information services](https://www.nice.org.uk/about/what-we-do/evidence-services) for commissioners, practitioners and managers across the spectrum of health and social care.

See[: https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance](:%20https:/www.nice.org.uk/guidance)

3. BMJ Best Practice

* BMJ Best Practice takes you quickly and accurately to the latest evidence-based information, whenever and wherever you need it.
* Our step by step guidance on diagnosis, prognosis, treatment and prevention is updated daily using robust evidence based methodology and expert opinion.
* We support you in implementing good practice.

See: <https://www.bestpractice.bmj.com/info/>

**Business process set:**

A collective name given to all the many processes undertaken by an organisation that are not included in the product/service realization processes. Although these business processes may reference specific processes from the product/service realization process set they should not attempt to replicate already readily available process and procedure documentation from this set. They are equally as important as the Product/Service realisation processes as they are the system infrastructure that enables patient care, activities like scheduling, appointments, communication, records, etc.

**Standard work as a baseline for communication**

Would standard work, if suitably visualized (documented), facilitate 'entrepreneurial leadership' in terms of, for example performance, if it was available in the 'adaptive space' in Prof. Mary Uhl-Bien's Complexity Leadership Model? See: <https://www.sagewaysconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ComplexityLeadershipTheory_HRPS_39.2_Arena_Uhl_Bien.pdf>

**Standard work to reduce variation in performance and to improve performance**

Performance is the summation of all the activities, systems, facilities, equipment, etc that come together to achieve our organisations aim. It is safe to say that, in the NHS, a large measure of performance is derived from the work of individual, front line, employees, more so than in many other sectors where there is a greater degree of automation. Our work is supported by all these other elements. So many of our daily work activities do not focus on our aim and therefore reduce our performance in relation to our aim.

What is our aim? Patient safety, quality care, to meet outcome targets? How about IHI's Triple Aim?

The IHI Triple Aim is a framework developed by the American Institute for Healthcare Improvement that describes an approach to optimizing health system performance. It is IHI’s belief that new designs must be developed to simultaneously pursue three dimensions, which we call the “Triple Aim”:

•Improving the patient experience of care (including quality and satisfaction);

•Improving the health of populations; and

•Reducing the per capita cost of health care.

Or Juran's Trilogy of Quality Planning (QP), Quality Control (QC) and Quality Improvement (QI). Here Juran refers his definition of quality i.e. Big Q and not the NHS's definition which Juran calls little q.

Once standard work, which will be focused on the organization’s aim, has been designed and documented this will provide a baseline specification for the other elements required to support their work i.e. Digital applications, to be designed with that same focus on our aim. How many paper based or online forms are still being used in our day to day work that no longer focus on the organization's aim?

Standard work is simply a description of what we actually do when at work divided into defined processes. The documentation of standard work can be achieved in a number of ways but should always relate to specific processes. Each process being the subject of a standard work documentation set. A standard work documentation set can consist of first a process illustration (visualization) which usually takes the form of a flow chart. The flow chart identifies the series of steps required to complete the process. Each step, depending on its complexity, will have some associated procedure, guidance, work instruction etc. Policy, regulations and standards, relating to the process, will be identified and their requirements met in the process design. Importantly Patient Safety will be designed into each process in addition to the human factors relevant for the people doing the work.

Digital technologies should be fully utilised in publishing this documentation set negating the requirement for any printed material. An example of this can be found at <http://www.catmalvern.co.uk/nhs>where the Busyfish Process Visualization Methodology (BPVM) is used to display standard work. Links from text in a flowchart representation of the process allows the reader to drill down to procedures and guidance for each task in the process.