

About AQUA

Our institute, which was founded in Göttingen in 1995, is one of the most experienced and successful providers of concepts and innovative problem solutions in the area of quality improvement in health care in Germany.

AQUA is one of Germany's pioneers in peer-review groups (quality circles) in medicine, of the evaluation of new care models, the development and implementation of quality indicators, of patient surveys and data-based quality management. AQUA has dedicated itself to the development of a nation-wide quality assurance system in health care according to § 137a SGB V since autumn 2009.

Our institute is distinguished by its close scientific links, combined with a strict focus on practical implementation. The combined know-how of our multi-discipline teams guarantees the development of complex projects at the most current level of knowledge and experience. Moreover, AQUA maintains intensive co-operation with a large number of external experts as well as patient representatives.

Professional independence, scientific excellence and neutrality make up the foundation of our work – this is the only basis from which credible, trustworthy information about the quality of care can develop.

Detailed information about AQUA's current focus areas can be found on our website. We look forward to you stopping by.

“We want quality assurance which motivates and supports doctors and institutions in health care services to continuously work towards improvement and which creates more transparency and trust for the patients.“

Prof. Joachim Szecsenyi at the signing of the contract with the Federal Joint Committee on the 28th August 2009

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Tasks within the framework of the German social code book (§ 137a SGB V)

Cross-sectoral quality
in health care



Obligations according to § 137a SGB V [German social code book]

The AQUA Institute, by order of the Federal Joint Committee, undertakes the tasks of a professionally independent institution for quality assurance according to § 137a SGB V.

Quality knows no limits

The most significant aspect of this task lies in a new, cross-sectoral approach towards quality assurance. From now on, this will consider the whole course of treatment and will therefore be more strongly orientated towards patient needs.

From the patient's point of view, the quality of care within individual sectors (outpatient, inpatient, primary care, secondary specialist care) plays a secondary role. The success of the treatment as a whole is much more important – regardless of the sector the patients are involved in.

However, in the quality assurance which had been legal up until recently, the courses of treatment were barely visible because it was not observed as a whole. Breakdowns in information and problems in communication between the different sectors were not systematically dealt with, even though they can lead to a substantial lack of quality and safety.

From now on, the goal of the new quality assurance is looking at the cross-sectoral chain of care for the whole system. This obligation from § 137a SGB V presents a challenge which is without precedent even on an international level. It therefore requires a structured development process. It needs good co-operation with partners in health care services and not least a new communicative culture between care sectors e.g. through the interdisciplinary discussion of results.

Procedure and development

AQUA develops scientifically-based quality indicators which enable fair comparisons between health care providers and health care institutions. AQUA is supported in this by numerous experts from different sectors and patient representatives. The Federal Joint Committee governs the further concrete implementation (e.g. structures and data streams) into the health care system.

The contract with the Federal Joint Committee includes the continuation and further development of the current system of external quality assurance in hospitals (including external comparisons and benchmarking), which started some years ago.

Hospitals provide the corresponding agencies on a regional (“Länder”) level with information which they then handle it to AQUA. Only for very specialized procedures (such as transplant medicine, for example) does the information go directly to the AQUA Institute.

From now on, the following sectors will be dealt with: inpatient, contracted doctors and dentists, outpatient operations, outpatient treatment in the hospital (§ 116b SGB V) and disease management programs. Good co-operation with the German system of self-governance agencies will be a major goal here.

Partnerships

The AQUA Institute intensively co-operates with scientific partners. These include:

- Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Centre, Centre for Quality of Care Research, Prof. Richard Grol, Michel Wensing PhD
- University Hospital Heidelberg, Institute for Medical Biometry and Informatics, Prof. Meinhard Kieser
- University Hospital Heidelberg, Dept. of General Practice and Health Services Research, Prof. Joachim Szecsenyi

Acceptance in practice

Measurements of quality can only be as good as the available data allows. Simply setting this up is however not an end in itself: practical need for action can only be realized and formulated with secured data. It is therefore important that the documentation is met with high acceptance from the doctors and institutions involved.

This appeared to us as a low effort of documentation for the purpose of data economy; the possibility of using routine claims data as well as understandable and comprehensible solutions and reports is important.

SQG – Transparency in information

SQG stands for cross-sectoral quality in health care. Complete information on quality assurance according to § 137a SGB V can be found on the internet on the www.sqg.de information platform set up by AQUA.

Target groups are those participating and the interested public. Here, they will find a multitude of answers to their questions about the continuation of existing procedures and the development of new ones, about quality assurance's background and legal foundation as well as many other significant figures. Results generated by AQUA are mandatory for the individual quality reports of hospitals. They are then in a second step used by numerous web-sites which provide information on hospitals and do compare them. Furthermore, on this site all relevant services and documents about the practical implementation of quality assurance will be provided.

