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# British Journal of Nursing

## Ten Simple Rules for achieving sustainable Quality Improvement in Nursing Practice

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## **BJN front cover**

**Commissioned article for the Ten Simple Rules For...  
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**Title: Ten Simple Rules for achieving sustainable  
Quality Improvement in Nursing Practice**

By: Melanconia Duval Pazzaglia – Lecturer Practitioner in Critical Care University of West London/ London University healthcare Trust and Dr.Elena Ivany – Research associate for nursing research, University College London Hospital

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**Ten Simple Rules for Achieving Sustainable Quality Improvement in Nursing Practice**

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The implementation of sustainable quality improvement (QI) initiatives remains a significant challenge in nursing practice. This paper presents an evidence-based guide comprising ten systematic steps designed to facilitate the development and maintenance of sustainable QI projects within healthcare settings. The guide integrates established methodological approaches, including the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle, with practice-oriented strategies for stakeholder engagement and resource optimization. This structured approach addresses key elements of sustainable QI through four core components: preliminary capability assessment, project-specific sustainability planning, systematic implementation and outcome measurement. The methodology draws from current healthcare guidelines and recent research across multiple healthcare settings, validated through pilot implementations in diverse clinical environments. The findings demonstrate that sustainable QI initiatives require systematic planning, continuous stakeholder engagement, and incremental implementation strategies. This evidence-based guide provides healthcare practitioners practical, actionable steps for implementing and maintaining quality improvements in clinical practice, offering a bridge between theoretical QI models and real-world application.

**Keywords:** quality improvement, sustainability, nursing, healthcare innovation, PDSA cycle, practice change.

## **Introduction:**

Nurses are at the forefront of implementing changes in practice through quality improvement initiatives (QI), whether it's introducing a new clinical protocol or embracing novel technologies. Sustainability is key to ensuring that these changes last. This is achieved by maximizing the positive aspects of how you deliver care now while thinking about what could be improved or changed in the future (NHSI, 2007). Below we have collated ten practical tips to help you in your journey to sustainable QI, whatever your level of experience.

Ten steps to sustainable quality improvement:

1. Knowledge is power.

To deliver effective and sustainable QI, it is necessary to assess the skills within an existing team and identify areas for development. Numerous resources are available to introduce the principles of QI, as well as the principles of creating individual learning needs analyses (see Table 1).

## 2. Sustainability is project specific.

The definition of sustainability varies depending on the QI project. For example, some projects may focus on optimizing resource utilization, while others prioritize patient outcomes. Sustainability planning should align with the project's aims and objectives and be embedded from the outset.

## 3. Planning is key.

Effective planning is the foundation of successful QI (NHS England, 2022). The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) (Figure 1) cycle provides a structured framework for breaking down QI projects into manageable tasks. Both short-term and long-term planning are essential for creating a service that remains sustainable over time.

## 4. Use all available resources.

Effective QI must balance the need for innovation with existing financial and workforce challenges (Mortimer, 2018). Therefore, it is always preferable to prioritise existing resources, such as team expertise, funding, time, and equipment, rather than seeking external solutions.

## 5. Engage with stakeholders early.

Early identification of stakeholders, individuals or groups of people who are needed to support QI implementation, allows for a greater opportunity to create a cohesive project that acknowledges the views of those who can contribute to making the QI project a success (Gagnon et al., 2024). Stakeholder engagement should be a continuous process that relies on clear, open communication and a shared vision of the QI objective.

## 6. Sustainability relies on teamwork.

Gaining team support ensures the long-term efficiency and effectiveness of QI initiatives (Tawfik et al., 2017). Team members should be involved throughout the project, with their input and concerns actively considered and acted upon. QI leaders can influence

others through their actions showing commitment to the new practice by early, consistent adoption and encouraging others to do the same.

#### 7. Sustainability is best achieved in small steps.

Sustainability is achieved incrementally, it is a marathon, not a sprint. The Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle (NHS England, 2022) supports gradual change. Small pilots, followed by feedback and adjustments, help mitigate risks but also give the team time to adapt and build confidence.

#### 8. Sustainability can be measured.

Establishing measurable outcomes is essential for evaluating the sustainability of QI projects. Outcomes may include tracking changes at multiple time points or conducting large-scale evaluations at the conclusion of each PDSA cycle. Regardless of the approach, attention should be given to building sustainability into the relevant outcomes and plan accordingly (Flynn, et al., 2020)

#### 9. Disseminate your work.

Dissemination of QI project updates can help gain new insight and promote sustainable change. It is advisable to use familiar platforms initially such as team meetings, newsletters or hospital intranets to communicate updates, share progress, and gather feedback. As projects evolve, regional and national platforms, such as specialist conferences, can be used to showcase progress and outcomes.

#### 10. Celebrate your achievements.

Celebrating milestones reinforces the benefits of sustainable change and maintains team morale. Recognition can include sharing positive patient feedback or acknowledging team members' contributions. Regular acknowledgment of progress helps sustain motivation.

### **Conclusion**

Leading on sustainable QI in healthcare is an opportunity to build services that meet the needs of patients for years to come. Through careful planning, involvement of your team and other key stakeholders, and a step-by-step approach, you can ensure that changes to practice are efficient, effective, and sustainable.

### **References**

Flynn R, Stevens B, Bains A, Kennedy M, Scott SD. Identifying existing approaches used to evaluate the sustainability of evidence-based interventions in healthcare: an integrative review. *Syst Rev.* 2022 Oct 15;11(1):221. doi: 10.1186/s13643-022-02093-1. PMID: 36243760; PMCID: PMC9569065.

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**Table 1.** Suggested resources to learn more about sustainable quality improvement.

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Access link</b>
The NHS Institute Handbook of Quality and Service Improvement Tools	<a href="#">the handbook of quality and service improvement tools 2010-2.pdf (england.nhs.uk)</a>
First steps towards quality improvement	<a href="#">Layout 1 (england.nhs.uk)</a>
Stakeholder engagement in quality improvement	<a href="#">Layout 1 (aqua.nhs.uk)</a>
Various modules of quality improvement	<a href="#">NHSE elfh Hub (e-lfh.org.uk)</a>
Learning needs analysis	<a href="#">Assessing Learning needs.</a>



**Figure 1:** Embedding sustainability into the stages of the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle