

CIS Information Service Quality Assurance Guidelines

Introduction

Quality management in the CIS Information Service is an ongoing process of setting realistic and challenging standards, providing the resources and tools necessary to achieve the standards, and establishing measures to assess progress toward attaining the standards. Quality measures are embedded in the tools used for monitoring quality and provide the framework for evaluating the quality of service provided to CIS customers who contact us by telephone, LiveHelp, and E-mail. The quality measures for the Information Service are:

- **Information Needs:**
 - Needs of customer identified through appropriate and complete needs assessment
 - Accurate information provided
 - Complete information provided
 - Information presented in an organized manner

- **Delivery:**
 - Rapport established
 - Courteous, professional delivery of information
 - Credible delivery of information
 - Empathy conveyed appropriately

- **Adherence to CIS Policy, Procedures, and Protocols:**
 - Information provided consistent with CIS policies, procedures, and/or protocols

Quality assurance refers to the activities that help assure that a product or service meets established requirements. Customers interact with the CIS Information Service via telephone, LiveHelp, and E-mail. The monitoring of these interactions is an example of a quality assurance activity. Monitoring activities may occur in real-time, as with call monitoring, or after the interaction takes place, as with review of LiveHelp and E-mail responses.

Monitoring ensures that customers have their needs properly assessed and met by knowledgeable, empathetic, and efficient Information Specialists. Monitoring the quality of interactions also benefits Information Specialists by providing performance feedback.

Purpose of the CIS Quality Assurance Guidelines

The following guidelines are intended to facilitate continuous quality service to the public. The purpose of the CIS Quality Assurance Guidelines is to provide:

- Uniform CIS metrics for ensuring the quality of service provided by individual Information Specialists
- Quality assurance and performance feedback practices for Supervisors
- Standard monitoring tools for Supervisors and Information Specialists
- A standard network reference for training Supervisors to monitor and assess quality

Rationale for Quality Assurance

Quality assurance plays a key role in performance evaluation and ongoing quality improvement of the Information Service. Monitoring the quality of interactions ensures that Information Specialists provide service in accordance with established quality measures. Monitoring Information Specialists according to their level of performance allows Supervisors to focus their efforts on the needs of the Information Specialist, facilitate the delivery of meaningful feedback, and plan specialized training/continuing education. Quality monitoring also allows Managers to track overall office trends and identify regional training needs.

When tied to concrete performance measures and delivered in a supportive environment, feedback aids in the continued professional development of Information Specialists. All Information Specialists should be treated equally, fairly, and should be fully aware of established quality measures and individual performance expectations. Knowledge of expectations relative to individual performance enhances Information Specialists' ability to provide quality service and contribute to the overall mission of the CIS.

The Role of the Information Service Supervisor in Quality Assurance

As specified in the CIS Performance Standards and Operational Guidelines (PSOG), monitoring staff performance is a primary responsibility of CIS Information Service Supervisors. Supervisors should spend 75% of their total work time engaged in supervisory duties (including quality assurance and providing technical assistance).

The ability to assess the quality of Information Specialists' performance and offer feedback depends on the experience of the Supervisor and his/her demonstrated knowledge of cancer information, CIS policies, and network operations. Supervisors utilize their expertise to evaluate a call, LiveHelp session, or E-Mail

response, and offer Information Specialists an informed appraisal of their performance.

The Information Service Manager shall ensure consistency of Supervisors' quality assurance skills in each regional office. This joint effort by Managers and Supervisors helps to:

- Ensure consistent use of quality assurance tools and credibility of the evaluation results
- Ensure consistent performance feedback so that Supervisors and Managers are speaking with "one voice"
- Provide Information Specialists with a fair analysis of performance
- Track office-wide performance trends

Environment for Quality Assurance

Ideally, the evaluation of Information Specialists' performance will be discreet and conducted without the knowledge of the Specialist being assessed. When monitoring, Supervisors should have access to the appropriate software such as *Center Vu Supervisor* or *LiveHelp Supportal*. Discreet assessment of performance can be conducted in a variety of settings depending on the specific office configuration. Monitoring may take place in a remote area outside the workroom or while seated at the Information Specialist's workstation in order to provide immediate feedback. "Desk audits" with the Specialist may allow the Supervisor to observe work patterns, such as the utilization of resources or completion of coding. The environment should allow appropriate time to focus on the **entire** interaction. Only complete, uninterrupted interactions should be evaluated.

Quality Assurance Tools

A quality interaction is more than the sum of its parts. The *CIS Call Monitoring Tool* (Attachment A) and *CIS LiveHelp Quality Assurance Tool* (Attachment B) are designed to provide information about the quality outcomes as opposed to quantitative output derived from a checklist of quality items. A quality interaction is defined as one in which the customer's information needs are met with accurate, appropriate, and comprehensive information that is delivered in a professional and empathetic manner within the policies and scope of the CIS. This also includes conducting CIS research interventions appropriately, and proficient use of all approved resources.

All Supervisors should use the standard quality assurance tools when monitoring Information Specialists' performance. These tools were developed from feedback from callers, Supervisors, and Information Specialists and their perspectives on what constitutes quality service. The tools are also grounded in knowledge gained from the National Call Monitoring Program and the LiveHelp

pilot. The accompanying *CIS Call Monitoring Tool: Quality Measures, Indicators, and Scoring Categories* (Attachment C) explains how to use the *Call Monitoring Tool* ratings. The *LiveHelp Quality Assurance Tool Definitions / Criteria* (Attachment D) explains how to use the *LiveHelp Quality Assurance Tool* ratings.

The Call Monitoring Database (CMD) is a data-collection and management tool that assists CIS regional management in the quality assurance process for telephone contacts. This Web-based application, available via CISnet, allows regional Supervisors to input call monitoring data into a Web-based Call Monitoring Tool, save, and review the records. The CMD allows regional management teams to track individual Information Specialist's performance as well as office-wide performance trends through various reports. The CMD also enables Information Specialists to view their own records and be active participants in monitoring their individual performance and progress. Future plans for CMD involve adding LiveHelp and E-mail quality assurance forms and monitoring results to the application.

Monitoring Schedules

Performance and experience should drive the frequency with which interactions are monitored. Depending on these factors, Information Specialists may be monitored daily, weekly, or monthly. The minimum number of interactions to be monitored monthly is outlined in the Quality Assurance Guidelines table, page 5. The Supervisor should determine individual monitoring based on the following parameters:

- Newly trained Information Specialists should be monitored 100% until a consistent performance profile is established for each type of interaction. Once established, monitoring may accelerate or taper off depending on individual performance.
- High-performing Information Specialists should be monitored on a schedule that reflects demonstrated competency as exhibited by consistent performance patterns.
- Low-performing Information Specialists should be monitored more frequently with training and remediation plans implemented as necessary.

Note that for new staff handling telephone contacts, the first 4 weeks of call monitoring results do not need to be entered into the CMD. Supervisors and Training Coordinators have the flexibility to provide coaching and feedback, formally and informally, in a training environment tailored to the individual.

Uniform Guidelines for Quality Assurance

Quality assurance should capture a sufficient sampling of an Information Specialist's calls, LiveHelp sessions, and E-mail responses to provide meaningful feedback on overall performance. The following table provides guidelines for the minimum number of interactions that should be monitored per month based on previous performance. Supervisors may use their discretion to increase the number of interactions based on staff needs or individual situations that require more attention.

It is the CIS Project Office's expectation that regional offices and POS meet these guidelines monthly.

Quality Assurance Guidelines		
Meets Expectations	Needs Improvement	Unacceptable
Previous month's monitoring score: 6	Previous month's monitoring score: 5 – 4	Previous month's monitoring score: 3 – 0
Minimum monitoring expectations for current month: 4 - 5 interactions (i.e., telephone calls, and/or LiveHelp sessions, and/or E-mail responses)	Minimum monitoring expectations for current month: 5 or more interactions (i.e., telephone calls, and/or LiveHelp sessions, and/or E-mail responses)	Minimum monitoring expectations for current month: 100% of telephone calls, and/or LiveHelp sessions, and/or E-mail responses until improvement is consistently demonstrated or Information Specialist is removed from point of access

Providing Feedback

Individualized, constructive feedback is an essential step in encouraging Information Specialists to continually improve the quality of their interactions. Ideally, quality feedback should be provided on the same day the interaction is monitored. The primary advantage of this approach is that the interaction with the customer is fresh in the minds of both the Information Specialist and the Supervisor. Timely feedback benefits the Information Specialist by immediately reinforcing the positive aspects of the interaction, and facilitates immediate awareness of areas for improvement.

Performance feedback should be given in a private environment during a face-to-face meeting between the Supervisor and the Information Specialist. Performance feedback should be consistent among members of the supervisory team. A copy of the completed quality assurance tool should be provided to the Information Specialist. In addition, Supervisors may also retain a copy of the completed quality assurance tool in order to build a performance profile and track trends of each Information Specialist. (For telephone contacts, this information is also stored in the CMD.) Information Specialists should be kept apprised of performance trends over time.

Finally, experience may influence an Information Specialist's performance scores. For new Information Specialists, Supervisors should take lack of experience into account and coach them in such a way that they are confident that they will build expertise over time. It is expected that an Information Specialist's performance will improve as his or her experience, knowledge and skills increase.

The Importance of Training for Quality Assurance

A consistent skill set for Supervisors across the CIS network is essential to the successful performance of quality assurance activities. It is the responsibility of each regional office to ensure that Supervisors are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills before evaluating staff performance. Managers in each regional office are responsible for identifying training opportunities to ensure those skills are obtained. This can be done through collaboration with individual parent institutions or other appropriate means.

The following list represents the knowledge and skills that, minimally, a Supervisor must possess in order to perform quality monitoring in the CIS:

- Understanding of the purpose of quality assurance in the CIS
- Orientation to the most current versions of the appropriate Quality Assurance Tools and Guidelines, including thorough instruction on the use of the tool(s)
- Knowledge of CIS policies, procedures, and protocols
- Understanding of the practical application and utilization of CIS phone technology and web-based technology, including ECRF and CMD
- Ability to assess quality of research interventions
- Ability to apply exceptional listening, written, and oral communication skills to the quality assurance process
- Ability to provide consistent performance feedback and coaching to staff

Clear performance objectives for Information Specialists and delivery of constructive feedback and coaching from skilled Supervisors will ensure that the CIS remains the "Gold Standard" of Cancer Information Services.

The Value of Sharing Information

Quality assurance can be conducted in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. Monitoring may be done for other purposes, as described below.

Listening to colleagues' calls and NICE audio files, and reviewing LiveHelp and E-mail responses can empower and educate Information Specialists. Discussions between inexperienced and experienced staff and/or Management staff can be used to educate Information Specialists on the skills and techniques of Supervisors and seasoned staff. Educational monitoring is an excellent way to model desired behavior and skills. Feedback from these types of sessions should always be given in a group setting and not to one individual Specialist. Individual performance feedback is the role of the Manager and Supervisor. Allowing Information Specialists to listen to each other, read each other's transcripts and responses and exchange ideas is an appropriate way to track office trends and disseminate useful strategies among staff.