



## A MODEL WITH A FUTURE: STANDARDISED QUALITY REVIEWS IN SWISS HOSPITALS AND CLINICS

ANQ | Dr. Petra Busch, Nora Fehr

**For over ten years, Switzerland has employed a compulsory programme to carry out quality reviews in inpatient facilities providing acute care, psychiatric treatment and rehabilitation. The results of these outcome reviews are published transparently under the names of the relevant institutions. The reviews allow hospitals and clinics to compare themselves to other institutions and to take specific measures to improve the quality of the treatment they provide. The Swiss National Association for Quality Development in Hospitals and Clinics (ANQ) is responsible for the coordination and implementation of the reviews as well as for the analysis and publication of the results, and carries out its tasks in cooperation with independent review and assessment institutes.**

### Pioneering achievements and shared undertakings

ANQ was established in 2009 as a result of close cooperation between the relevant stakeholders in the Swiss healthcare system. The decisive factor was the Swiss Health Insurance Act (KVG), which stipulated an obligation for hospitals, clinics and health insurance providers to enter into quality assurance agreements that would require them to periodically review the effectiveness, appropriateness and cost-effectiveness of their services. ANQ was thus established by the Swiss Association of Hospitals (H+), all cantons of Switzerland, the Swiss health insurance associations curafutura and santésuisse and the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Health Directors to implement these requirements as efficiently as possible. The main objectives were defined as the standardised implementation of outcome reviews, and the transparent publication of nationwide results in the inpatient areas of acute care, psychiatry and rehabilitation in a comparable form.

### Key factors for success

The following factors were and are crucial for the success of the quality review system in Switzerland:

- 1. Everyone is represented at ANQ.** From the very beginning, every relevant organisation in the healthcare sector has participated in the various ANQ committees. This organisational structure ensures that viable solutions can be found even for controversial issues. The board of ANQ is made up equally of representatives of the hospitals and clinics, cantons and health insurance providers. One of the tasks of the board is to define the quality indicators and instruments used to conduct the reviews; in this connection, the board liaises closely with ANQ quality committees and expert panels.
- 2. The reviews are contractually agreed and the participation rate is 100%.** Since 2011, all Swiss hospitals and clinics, cantons and health insurance providers have signed up to the National Quality Agreement drawn up by ANQ. This agreement stipulates that cost carriers (health insurance providers and cantons) must finance the reviews, and that service providers must take part and agree to the assessment and publication of the data collected.
- 3. ANQ reviews take a practical approach.** The results of the reviews serve as the basis for quality enhancement in the institutions. The primary goal is to provide hospitals and clinics with a basis for decision-making, so that they can identify potential for action and initiate measures for improvement which ultimately benefit patients.

### Continuous improvement of the review process

ANQ published the first review outcomes in 2010. At the time, these were still published in anonymous form. The first report naming the relevant institutions was published in 2013. Today, a total of 15 quality indicators are reviewed in around 400 hospitals and clinics in the sectors of acute care, psychiatry and rehabilitation, and the results are published in transparent form. Depending on the subject of the review, adults and parents of children and adolescents up to the age of 16 years may be interviewed while

THE SWISS NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR QUALITY DEVELOPMENT IN HOSPITALS AND CLINICS (ANQ) HAS BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR QUALITY REVIEWS IN THE INPATIENT HOSPITAL SETTING AND FOR THE PUBLICATION OF COMPARATIVE REPORTS SINCE 2009.

their data may also be collected. The ANQ review plan is regularly reviewed and improved. Two pilot projects on quality reviews in outpatient acute care and intermediary outpatient psychiatric care are currently in the pipeline.

**Evaluation and publication of review outcomes**

ANQ aims to enable hospitals and clinics to continuously improve their processes. It therefore provides institutions with hospital- and clinic-specific evaluations, as well as national comparison reports. These typically include comparisons with the previous year. Since services, infrastructures and patient groups can differ considerably, statistical methods (risk adjustment) are used to make the data comparable at the national level.

Review results provide valuable information not only to the institutions, but also to the cantons, health insurance providers and interested public. In communications, ANQ always describes the statistical methods used and indicates where there is room for interpretation. It is important to note that the review outcomes relate to a specific quality factor and do not allow any conclusions to be drawn about the overall quality of an institution. It may thus be that a hospital scores well in one particular area, but shows clear potential for improvement in another.

**ANQ reviews reveal improvements**

The publication of the review outcomes promotes competition and enables hospitals and clinics to benchmark and exchange best practice concepts. A great deal has changed in terms of quality in Switzerland in recent years, as demonstrated by the example of postoperative wound infection rates. Since 2011, there has been a statistically significant decrease in infection rates after nine sur-

gical procedures, namely appendectomy, inguinal hernia surgery, bariatric surgery, colon surgery, heart surgery (all interventions and coronary artery bypass/CAB), elective hip replacement surgery and spinal surgery with and without implants.

Interactive graphics are displayed on the ANQ web portal for each specialist area (acute care, psychiatry and rehabilitation) as well as for each review topic and data year. The national comparison reports are also made available online on [www.anq.ch](http://www.anq.ch).

**Legislation will impact on framework conditions**

The entry into force of the revised Swiss Federal Health Insurance Act (KVG) on 1 April 2021 will have an effect on the framework conditions for quality assurance and development for all stakeholders in the Swiss health care system. In the future, there will no longer be just the single ANQ quality agreement. The law now requires that individual quality agreements be concluded in all areas of care. These will regulate not only the quality reviews, but also specify levels of improvement and penalties for failure to achieve targets. This means that the main providers of healthcare are now legally obligated to review and improve quality as part of their PDCA approach. In terms of the inpatient care sector, this means ANQ will need to adapt. In the future, in addition to the reviews presently undertaken, it will also provide services related to quality improvements. Thanks to the consensual decision-making system of ANQ, solutions will be found on how to implement this addition to the activities of the association that are broadly supported by the quality agreement partners and member organisations.

[www.anq.ch](http://www.anq.ch)

**ANQ review plan, using the example of acute care hospitals (last revised in January 2021)**

ACUTE CARE		
Indicator	Method	Tool
<b>Adults</b>		
Patient satisfaction	Survey	ANQ short questionnaire
Postoperative wound infections	Swissnoso programme	SSI surveillance module
Potentially preventable readmissions	SQLape	Medical statistical data Swiss Federal Statistical Office (BFS)
Falls and pressure ulcers	Prevalence review	LPZ International
Knee and hip implants	Registration	SIRIS implant register
Spinal implants	Registration	SIRIS implant register
<b>Children</b>		
Patient satisfaction	Parent survey	ANQ short questionnaire
Postoperative wound infections	Swissnoso programme	SSI surveillance module



Dr. Petra BUSCH, Managing Director of ANQ, looks back on the development of this broad-based organisation and gives – in addition to the ANQ profile published in previous pages – deeper insight into its work.

**ANQ has spent more than 10 years managing quality reviews in hospitals and clinics. Which milestones in its history do you look back on most fondly?**

We first published the rates of accidental falls and pressure ulcers at all acute care hospitals on our website in 2013, which was a huge milestone. We now publish the results for 15 quality indicators. ANQ is constantly adding to the scope of its reviews.

**How do patients benefit from the results of these reviews?**

ANQ reviews are primarily for the benefit of clinics and hospitals. They provide them with specific indicators as to what needs to be improved. But they also benefit patients directly. Not only do they help to enhance the quality of the treatment provided, but a wealth of information, interactive graphics and additional comments on the results are also available on the ANQ web portal. This information comes in useful when choosing a hospital, for example.

**The revised Health Insurance Act came into effect in Switzerland in early April 2021. What are the main changes and how do they impact on ANQ?**

The revised law places an even stronger focus on quality development. In addition to quality reviews, it includes provisions relating to improvement measures and also the imposition of penalties. However, I very much hope that we will continue to focus primarily on incentives, because in my experience, these encourage hospitals to systematically implement a PDCA approach.

The framework conditions for ANQ are changing. Implementation of specified improvements is a logical consequence of the reviews. This gives us exciting opportunities for targeted supplementation of the current services offered by ANQ.

**ANQ launched two pilot projects in the outpatient clinical setting in 2021. What are these projects about?**

Until recently, there were no standardised reviews of outcomes in the outpatient and intermediate clinical settings in Switzerland. The pilot projects in acute and psychiatric care

represent the first steps towards closing this gap and will hopefully allow us to measure quality along the outpatient-inpatient treatment chain. In addition to clinical outcome indicators, it is likely that patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) will also play an important role. We intend to gain experience in this area and determine whether PROMs can also be used systematically in larger settings and for fair hospital comparisons.

**ANQ is also garnering international attention. What is the secret of its success?**

At ANQ, service providers, providers of social security and health insurance and cantonal authorities all sit at the same table. Admittedly it is not always easy to find a common ground for the different interests. However, close cooperation between all the stakeholders involved and commitment to finding appropriate and workable solutions are the reasons for our success. We operate in accordance with clearly defined statutory provisions. Thanks to our broad-based organisational structure, ANQ is able to efficiently comply with these provisions and fulfil its tasks in a practical and benefit-orientated manner.