

Sustainability in Quality Improvement and the future

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What is Sustainability in Quality Improvement (SusQI)?

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) recognises sustainability as a domain of quality “which must run through and moderate other domains,” (**Box 1**) defining sustainability as considering not only the care delivered to a patient today but also that of the population and patients of the future¹.

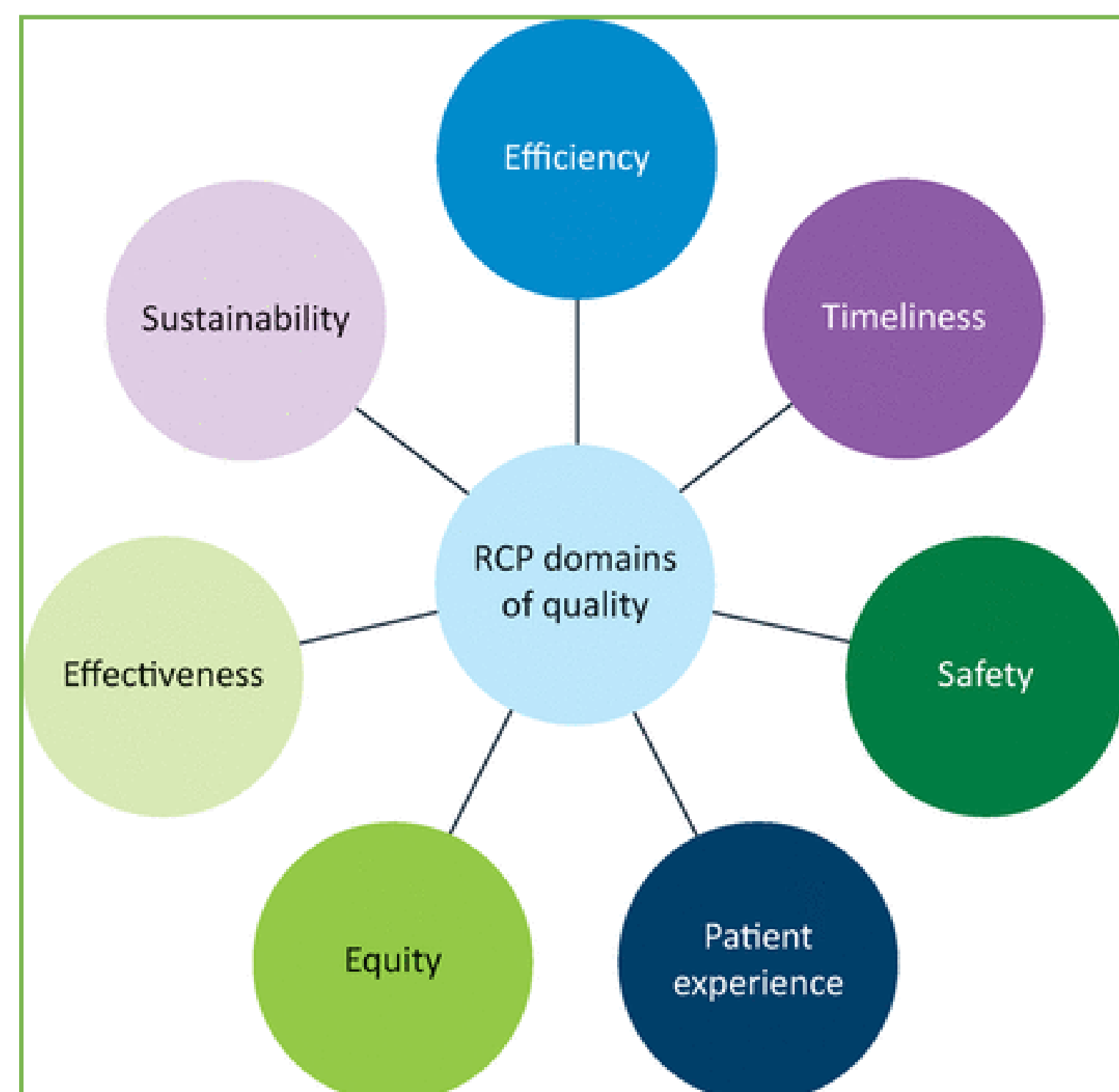
SusQI is a methodology used to embed the principles of sustainable clinical practice (**Box 2**) within QI to holistically improve healthcare. The unique consideration of environmental and social value in addition to economic value, measured against health outcomes, determines sustainable value (**Box 3**).

The importance of SusQI

It is well established that the climate crisis is the single biggest health crisis unfolding today². In 2020 the NHS committed to becoming a net zero health system³, which is now cemented in law⁴. NHS organisations will be held accountable to achieving their green action plans and research and innovation will be key to delivering this.

SusQI provides the tools to innovate and transform NHS systems and practices to drive towards net zero. However there remains a lack of awareness, understanding and practical application of SusQI. Clinical education and leadership is vital in fully harnessing potential positive changes⁵.

Box 1 The domains outlined in the RCP definition of quality.



1. PREVENTION

Promoting health and preventing disease by tackling the causes of illnesses and inequalities

3. LEAN SERVICE DELIVERY

Streamlining care systems to minimise wasteful activities



2. PATIENT SELF-CARE

Empowering patients to take a greater role in managing their own health and healthcare

4. LOW CARBON ALTERNATIVES

Prioritising treatments and technologies with a lower environmental impact

Box 2

Principles of sustainable clinical practice

“It just changes the way you look at things forever”

SusQI Education Programmes

The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare (CSH) has pioneered the integration of sustainability within QI education and practice.

1. The Academy programme, established in 2022, provides mentoring, education and peer-learning opportunities for academic and healthcare delivery institutions working to embed sustainability into their existing QI teaching and practice. So far, CSH has supported 8 institutions (23 individuals) in this.
2. Beacon site accreditation provides formal recognition of institutions, academic or healthcare, as leaders in integrating SusQI. There are currently 12 sites (aspiring and established).

Multi-centre evaluation of SusQI intergration into undergraduate and postgraduate education demonstrated **increased motivation** for, and **engagement with QI**, with the adoption of **a new sustainability ‘lens’**⁶. Evaluation from SusQI educators was equally positive, supporting feasibility for adoption of SusQI across diverse educational organisations⁷.

$$\text{Sustainable value} = \frac{\text{Outcomes for patients and populations}}{\text{Environmental + social + financial impacts}}$$

Box 3 Sustainable value impact analysis

SusQI in practice

The Green Teams competition (GTC) engages healthcare professionals to work collaboratively with CSH to design projects adopting the SusQI framework (**Box 4**) and measure its sustainable value. The seven participation organisations in 2022 GTCs demonstrated significant savings of over £780,000 and 7 million kgCO₂e - the equivalent of driving over 20 million miles⁸.



Box 4 The SusQI Framework - describes key steps to embed sustainability into the QI process

The future of SusQI

CSH is currently awaiting independent evaluation of the GTCs and the Academy programme to further improve services. We continue to reach out to education and healthcare facilities to embed and spread SusQI with the aim to incorporate it within all QI practice. We are also working internationally with our first overseas Academy site and next year will host an overseas GTC.



Find out more about SusQI at [SusQI.org](https://www.susqi.org) or via the QR code

References

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