

ISO 9001:2000 and Radiotherapy, a luxury or necessity?

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Quality management systems (QMS) have been developed in order to coordinate working relations among different professional groups. Deming's quality circle (fig.1) suggests planning procedures before implementing them and always improving them in daily practice.

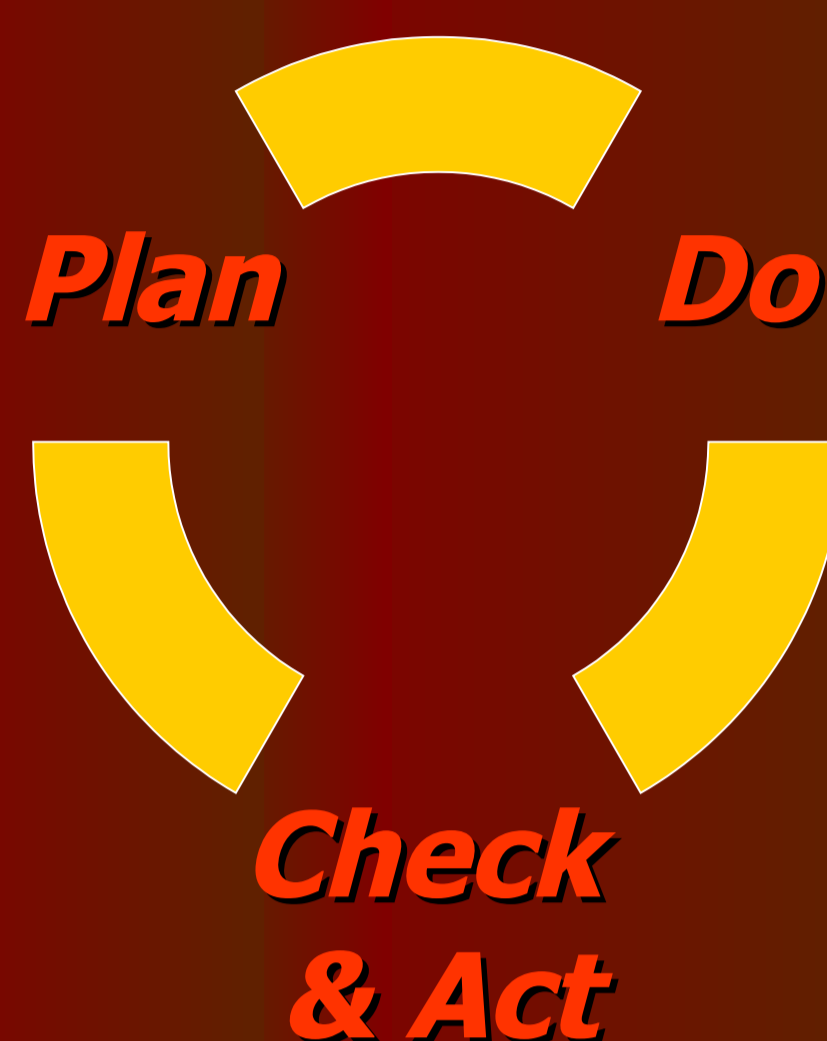


Figure 1: Deming's quality circle

Quality assurance is always a major issue in Radiotherapy Departments. Several guidelines concerning specific procedures such as dosimetry, patient positioning, clinical protocols, etc have been published and applied in daily clinical practice. However, dealing with these activities individually, may lead to a false estimation of the total outcome. The objective is to establish a quality management structure looking for optimal performance of different processes. The QMS in our department has been implemented in accordance with ISO 9001:2000 standard requirements. The initial step was to distinguish and report all the procedures applied in daily practice. Different tasks were then assigned to all members of collaborating staff including administrative persons, nurses, technologists, physicists and physicians (fig.2). All activities were revised and evaluated in order to ensure maximum quality and control of the processes. Certain difficulties occurred while developing the quality system, such as:

- Long documentation for each process
- Collaborating staff fail to support the system as they cannot appreciate its fundamental advantages
- Growing responsibilities to clarify procedures and decisions to the patients
- Lack of financial support for continuous education
- Multidisciplinary staff interacting with each other

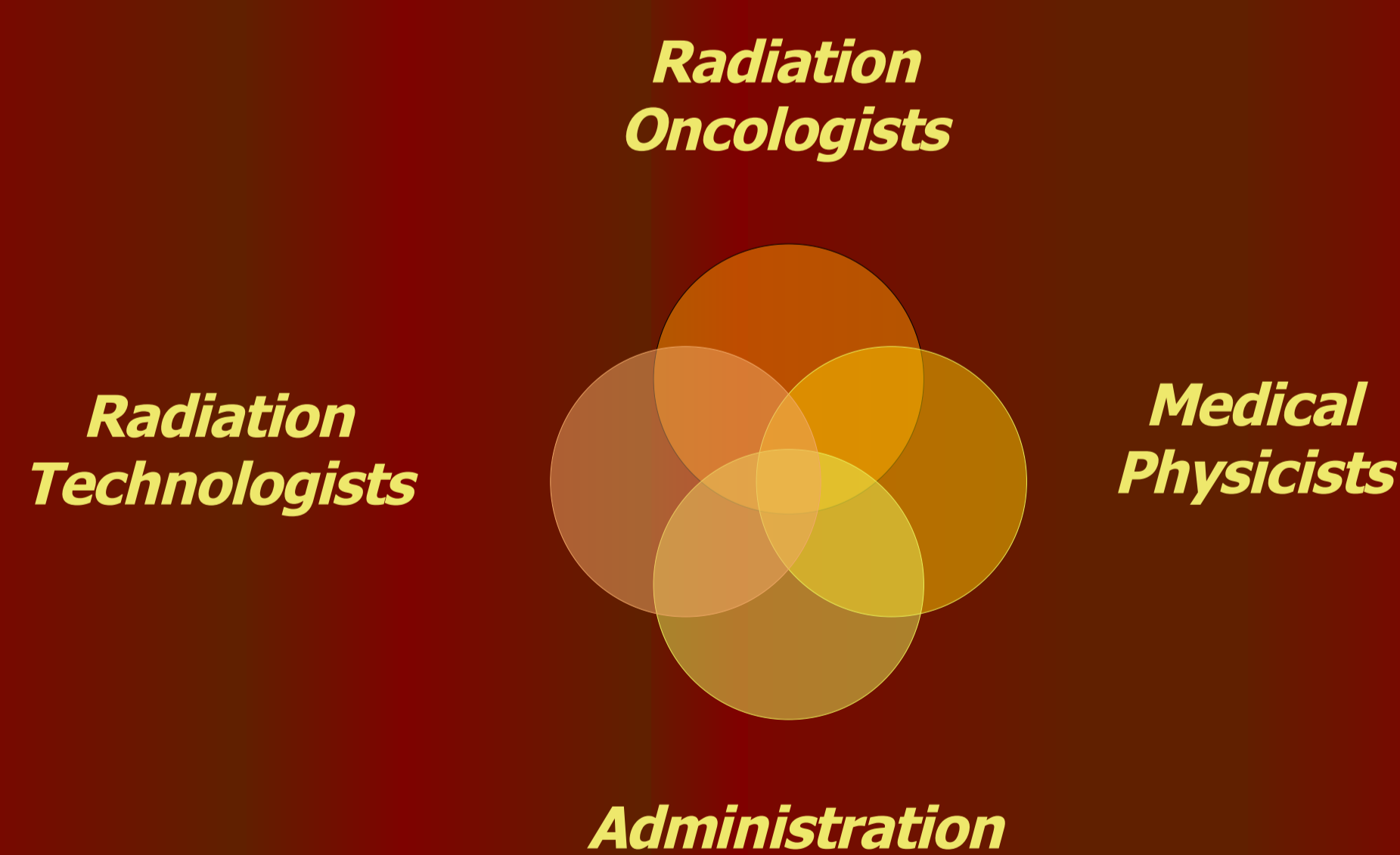


Figure 2: Collaborating staff in a Radiotherapy department

The potential benefits arising from the implementation of the QMS are the following:

- Assigned distinct responsibilities for those involved
 - Comprehensive procedures manual available to internal staff
 - Performance indicators to assess overall effectiveness and consistency
 - Systematic application of interdepartmental protocols
 - Enhanced interaction among members of different groups, everyone in the department is stimulated to participate
 - Improved communication with other hospital departments and external clients
- Error minimization

QMS development according to the ISO 9001:2000 standard requirements can gradually increase efficiency and improve the quality of care for the patients treated.