Case Study

Working in Partnership - The Advancing Quality Alliance (Aqua) and The Society of Acute Medicine

The Challenge

Acute medicine clinicians are working in an increasingly complex and high-pressure environment, where delivering safe, effective and sustainable care depends on their ability to continuously improve the systems around them.

However, many clinicians lacked the practical Quality Improvement (QI) skills, confidence and tools needed to identify problems, test changes and embed improvements in a structured, measurable way.

At the same time, the NHS's commitment to reaching net-zero placed new expectations on clinical teams to consider the environmental impact of their everyday decisions. Yet, for many clinicians, integrating sustainability into routine practice felt abstract, overwhelming or disconnected from their core clinical priorities.

The challenge, therefore, was to equip acute medicine clinicians with accessible, relevant and actionable QI capabilities, while also empowering them to embed principles of environmental sustainability into their day-to-day practice.

The programme needed to be practical, clinically grounded and directly aligned with the realities of a busy acute care setting.

Our Approach

The Society for Acute Medicine partnered with Aqua to design and deliver a bespoke Quality Improvement (QI) programme tailored for professionals in Acute Medicine.

This initiative was aimed at Consultants, Resident Doctors, Advanced Clinical Practitioners, Physician Associates, and Allied Health Professionals.

Across 4 half-day sessions participants were guided through QI theory, and how they could apply this to real world examples, specifically targeting improvements in Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC).

Alongside the sessions, each participant was asked to deliver a QI project, supported by coaching, to embed their learning into practice.

The Impact

Over three programme deliveries, 54 clinicians have taken part, representing 40+ hospitals. Across these cohorts, this partnership has helped to embed QI skills and theory across a wide range of organisations, equipping staff to drive meaningful improvements that directly benefit the communities they serve.

We dived in to one programme attendee's work, to see exactly what impact the programme has had for them. From attending the programme Emily has:

a. Built QI capability

Emily's project demonstrates:

- Use of audit data to identify gaps in documentation quality.
- Use of Aim Statements, Fishbone Analysis, Stakeholder Mapping, and PDSA cycles – all core QI methods.
- Pre- and post-intervention questionnaires showing changes in user acceptance, understanding, and perceived usefulness of the redesigned proforma.

These are all direct evidence that the participant learned and applied the QI tools taught on the programme.

b. Embedded sustainability thinking



Emily has included a sustainability impact tool, showing:

- Environmental considerations have been applied to the redesign.
- The QI work incorporated sustainability prompts and reflective thinking.

This links directly to the programme's dual focus on QI + environmental sustainability.

c. Increased confidence to lead change

Running:

- Two full PDSA cycles
- A multi-professional focus group
- A full redesign of a clinical document used by the entire AMU

…shows leadership, stakeholder engagement, and facilitation skills that the programme aims to develop.

You can take a look at Emily's project in full here.

What's Next

The work is continuing into 2026/27. Through sustained, open and collaborative conversations with the customer, and by drawing on the strong foundations and positive feedback from the 2025–26 programme, we have jointly reviewed the offer and agreed to progress with the next cohort, with a focus on 'ending corridor care.'

The next phase will further strengthen clinicians' capability to lead safe, effective and sustainable improvements in patient care. The 2026/27 programme continues to deliver the essential QI skills, coaching, and practical tools needed to support frontline teams, while also helping clinicians embed principles of environmental sustainability into everyday acute medical practice.

Aqua will provide a blended package of virtual learning, group coaching and structured support to help participants design, implement and showcase their QI projects.

If you're interested in attending the next cohort of the Acute Medics as Improvers programme then you can find more information here.

We welcome conversations with organisations interested in this model, exploring collaboration opportunities or adapting this blended learning and coaching approach to their local context. Interested colleagues are encouraged to get in touch to discuss how this work can support their improvement priorities.