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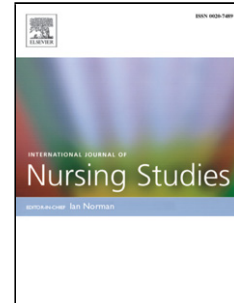
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Authors: Jennifer Gosling, Nicholas Mays, Bob Erens, David
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International Journal of Nursing Studies sponsored 2018 Health Services Research UK Annual Conference Prize Winning Abstract and Commentary

Improving the Quality of General Practice Services in the UK: Surveying the activities of GPs and Practice Managers (abstract & commentary)

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Background and objectives:

Improving the quality of general practice services has risen in priority as primary care has taken on an increasingly important role in National Health Service policy. In 2015 the Royal College of General Practitioners issued a guide to quality improvement (RCGP 2015) and a new on-line resource in early 2017 called Quality Now (<http://www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/our-programmes/quality-improvement.aspx>). However, there has been little research on the levers for improvement and a recent King's Fund report (King's Fund 2011) was unable to establish the nature and quantity of quality improvement work happening in practices. This is the first study of both General Practitioners and practice managers, across the UK, which looks at the range of improvement work going on, what motivates it, who is involved in this work and the barriers and facilitators practices face. It is important to understand these issues in order to focus training and better disseminate good practice and innovation across different countries.

The aims of the study were to explore whether the existing infrastructure and management of general practice is able to bear responsibility for service quality improvement; to establish what quality improvement work is currently being undertaken and by whom; to identify the barriers or facilitators to improvement work reported by GPs and practice managers and the improvement tools most often used.

Methods

The study comprised an online survey of all members of the Royal College of General Practitioners and a separate survey of all UK practice managers, preceded by an in-practice focus group and a series of semi-structured interviews with national policy actors, local General Practitioners and practice managers to inform the development of the survey.

Results

There is a wide range of improvement work happening in practices, a willingness to undertake improvement work and an appetite to learn about the tools and concepts of quality improvement. The motivation comes mostly from within the practice, rather than being externally driven. Important barriers reported are a lack of skills and knowledge of improvement tools, but even more important are high levels of patient demand and a lack of protected time for clinical and non-clinical staff and managers to undertake quality improvement activities.

Implications

However, for improvement work to take place consistently, practice teams need protected time to work together to identify, plan and implement improvement projects effectively. Other resources would be welcomed, as long as they do not come attached to targets or require what is perceived as excessive reporting. The results of the surveys will be disseminated widely to national organisations and professional bodies, such as the Health Foundation, Royal College of General Practitioners and Practice Management Network, and directly to practitioner groups via articles in trade press and practitioner meetings or conferences. This will allow them to better lead effective change in their organisations and improve the delivery of services to patients.

References

RCGP (2015) "Quality Improvement for General Practice: a guide for GPs and the whole practice team" London: Royal College of General Practitioners

The King's Fund (2011) "Improving the Quality of Care in General Practice" London: The King's Fund

Commentary

Peter Griffiths, Executive Editor IJNS

The abstract "Improving the Quality of General Practice Services in the UK: Surveying the activities of GPs and Practice Managers" won the International Journal of Nursing Studies sponsored prize for best poster reporting research of relevance to nursing at the 2018 Health Services Research UK annual conference in Nottingham, 4-5 July.

This prize recognises that much of what is called 'nursing' research is essentially health services research, meeting the 'working definition' offered by the Institute of Medicine in 1994

"Health services research is a multidisciplinary field of inquiry, both basic and applied, that examines access to, and the use, costs, quality, delivery, organization, financing, and outcomes of health care services to produce new knowledge about the structure, processes, and effects of health services for individuals and populations." (Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Health Services Research: Training and Work Force Issues, 1994)

Equally, in sponsoring this prize at a general health services research conference, we wanted to recognise that nurses are involved in health care delivery, planning and policy making in a wide range of settings and their work is undertaken in collaboration with a wide range of other health professionals as well as administrative, management and support staff. Nursing research and the research to inform nursing practice and policy cannot exist in isolation, something this journal has advocated since we launched our revised vision for the journal some years ago (Griffiths and Norman, 2011).

In selecting this poster, which reports on medical practitioners and practice managers (administrators / non-clinical managers) in a key part of the United Kingdom's primary care services (general practice) the judges embraced our brief and indeed challenged it. While the research did not directly involve nurses, which might be seen as an omission, quality improvement in primary care is hugely important as a large and increasing proportion of patient contact is with nurses, in the United Kingdom and worldwide (Murrells et al., 2015).

We congratulate the authors on this important study addressing quality improvement in a crucial care sector, which is often neglected.

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