Improving the effectiveness of multidisciplinary team meetings for patients with chronic diseases: a prospective observational study

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Declared competing interests of authors: none

Published October 2014
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02370
Plain English summary

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Health Services and Delivery Research 2014; Vol. 2: No. 37
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02370

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Plain English summary

Our study investigated multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings for chronic illnesses: cancer, dementia, heart failure and mental illnesses. These teams are widely used across the NHS. They comprise different professionals, for example doctors, nurses, social workers and psychologists, and meet weekly to discuss their patients and make treatment plans. The teams work in a wide variety of different ways, not all of which may be helpful for making high-quality decisions for patients. We wanted to identify the factors that influence effective decision-making in these teams (by which we mean decisions being carried out).

We found that 78% of treatment plans were implemented overall, though this varied across teams: mental health teams were less likely to have implemented the agreed plan than cancer, heart failure and memory clinic teams. By observing 370 meetings we identified factors that help explain this. Teams with many different types of professionals present at the meeting were less likely to carry out the treatment plans agreed by the team. It was also crucial to have a good team atmosphere, and clear goals and processes.

We found that patients living in more deprived areas were less likely to get the treatment recommended by the team. This was not explained by whether or not patients’ preferences or their other illnesses had been discussed.

We also found that individual teams had varying aims and organisational structure, and discussed different information when making decisions. Based on these differences, we asked a group of experts to recommend improvements to MDT meetings, which could help all teams regardless of whether they care for cancer, heart failure or mental health patients. They agreed on 21 indications for good practice, including that there should be yearly audits to check that MDT meetings are achieving their goals, and that the most appropriate time to discuss treatment options with patients is after the meeting, when information about treatment options is more complete.
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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its proceeding programmes as project number 09/2001/04. The contractual start date was in November 2010. The final report began editorial review in December 2013 and was accepted for publication in March 2014. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health.

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