

A qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the Advancing Quality pay-for-performance programme in the NHS North West

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Plain English summary

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Background

In 2008, a scheme was introduced offering the potential for health-care providers to earn financial rewards by improving quality for NHS patients. All 24 eligible hospitals in the North West region of England participated.

What we did

We talked to people involved in the scheme and observed them in meetings related to the scheme. We also measured the impact of the scheme by looking at whether or not it had improved the death rate of various conditions. These were adjusted for risk and known as 'risk-adjusted mortality'.

What we found

After the first 18 months of the scheme, we found that there was a reduction in risk-adjusted mortality for three clinical conditions included in the scheme. Although there was a reduction elsewhere, the reduction in the North West region was larger.

After the first 42 months of the scheme, we found that the fall in risk-adjusted mortality was greater in the rest of England than in the North West region. However, there was a fall in risk-adjusted mortality in the North West region for some clinical conditions not included in the incentive scheme, which was greater than that for the rest of England.

What can we conclude?

One interpretation is that the short-term improvements we found after 18 months were not sustained and that the observed reductions at 42 months in mortality in the conditions not included in the scheme were unrelated to the scheme. An alternative interpretation, however, is that the incentive scheme led to positive benefits in other clinical conditions in the same hospital.

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