Determining the optimal model for role substitution in NHS dental services in the UK: a mixed-methods study

Paul Brocklehurst,1* Stephen Birch,2 Ruth McDonald,3 Harry Hill,4 Lucy O’Malley,4 Richard Macey4 and Martin Tickle4

1School of Healthcare Sciences, Bangor University, Bangor, UK
2Faculty of Health Sciences, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, Canada
3Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
4School of Dentistry, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

*Corresponding author

Declared competing interests of authors: none

Published July 2016
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr04220

Plain English summary

Role substitution in NHS dental services in the UK
Health Services and Delivery Research 2016; Vol. 4: No. 22
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr04220

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk
Improving productivity in the NHS is a key consideration for policy-makers and is becoming increasingly important, given budgetary pressures on public expenditure. Across England, approximately half of the patients who attend for a regular NHS dental check-up do not require any further treatment, whereas half of the population does not regularly attend the dentist. In other words, the most expensive resource (the dentist) is seeing healthy patients at a time when many of those with the most dental health problems do not access care. One way to address this issue is to improve the productivity of the dental team. Role substitution, when non-dentist members of the dental team take on tasks previously limited to dentists, has the potential to do this. The aims of this study were to examine how productive dental teams are that make use of non-dentists and to explore the barriers to, and enablers of, change.

A multimethod approach was adopted using questionnaires, health-economic models specifically designed to measure productivity and interviews with dentists, their teams and patients. The extent of role substitution in NHS dentistry was limited; the most common non-dentist team member was the dental hygienist. As the number of non-dentist team members increased, the productivity of the NHS practice dropped. Financial incentives played a major role in this, but the views of practice principals were also important. Patients had a low level of awareness of the different roles of the dental team, but many had been seen and were happy to be treated by non-dentists.
Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)
ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (www.publicationethics.org/).

Editorial contact: nhredit@southampton.ac.uk

The full HS&DR archive is freely available to view online at www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr. Print-on-demand copies can be purchased from the report pages of the NIHR Journals Library website: www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Criteria for inclusion in the Health Services and Delivery Research journal

Reports are published in Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HS&DR programme or programmes which preceded the HS&DR programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

HS&DR programme

The Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) programme, part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), was established to fund a broad range of research. It combines the strengths and contributions of two previous NIHR research programmes: the Health Services Research (HSR) programme and the Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme, which were merged in January 2012.

The HS&DR programme aims to produce rigorous and relevant evidence on the quality, access and organisation of health services including costs and outcomes, as well as research on implementation. The programme will enhance the strategic focus on research that matters to the NHS and is keen to support ambitious evaluative research to improve health services.

For more information about the HS&DR programme please visit the website: http://www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/hsdr

This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its preceding programmes as project number 11/1025/04. The contractual start date was in February 2013. The final report began editorial review in August 2015 and was accepted for publication in January 2016. 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.

© Queen’s Printer and Controller of HMSO 2016. This work was produced by Brocklehurst et al. under the terms of a commissioning contract issued by the Secretary of State for Health. This issue may be freely reproduced for the purposes of private research and study and extracts (or indeed, the full report) may be included in professional journals provided that suitable acknowledgement is made and the reproduction is not associated with any form of advertising. Applications for commercial reproduction should be addressed to: NIHR Journals Library, National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre, Alpha House, University of Southampton Science Park, Southampton SO16 7NS, UK.

Published by the NIHR Journals Library (www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk), produced by Prepress Projects Ltd, Perth, Scotland (www.prepress-projects.co.uk).