

Getting the most out of knowledge and innovation transfer agents in health care: a qualitative study

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Information about how to make health-care services better often fails to reach those who could use the knowledge. A new role is increasingly being used to help overcome this problem by linking those with important knowledge to those who should use it. We call the people who make these link-ups knowledge and innovation transfer (KIT) 'agents'.

We followed 13 KIT agents from four Academic Health Science Networks in England and a regional network in Wales to see what they did and what helped them to become successful in their roles. We interviewed them, their line managers and people they helped, and agents kept diaries. We observed events and examined documents describing their roles. We held a meeting of 'experts' to discuss how to measure the results of the KIT agents' work.

Although the KIT agent roles varied, they all helped health-care staff to use knowledge. They strengthened relationships with researchers, patients and others who are a source of helpful knowledge. These roles were valued by the people the KIT agents assisted, but formal measures were rarely used to evaluate the impact of their work. They valued the KIT agents' expertise, flexibility and 'can-do' attitude. Insufficient time for the role sometimes made it difficult for the KIT agents. Having a supportive manager and team, sufficient time to do the job and a clear purpose all helped. Successful KIT agents combined experience with strong people skills to adapt what they did to the needs of the people they aimed to help.

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