

An evaluation of the effectiveness of annual health checks and quality of health care for adults with intellectual disability: an observational study using a primary care database

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

People with a learning disability, such as Down syndrome, have more health problems than the general population, leading to more unplanned visits to hospital, which can be very distressing. In response to concerns about health care for this group, NHS England introduced annual health checks for all adults with a learning disability, with general practitioners (GPs) being paid to provide them; however, only half of adults with a learning disability eligible for a health check have received one. It is unknown whether or not health checks make any important lasting difference to health, such as preventing hospital admissions. Using large anonymous databases of GP and hospital records, we investigated whether or not the introduction of health checks led to any reduction in unplanned hospital admissions for adults with a learning disability. We also described the health characteristics of these patients, addressing gaps in knowledge. Our main finding was that although health checks did not reduce overall unplanned admissions, they were associated with a reduction in potentially preventable hospital admissions. We also showed that adults with a learning disability had more recorded illnesses such as epilepsy and mental health problems, and consulted with their GP more, than the general population. However, they were less likely to have long GP consultations or to see the same doctor. Last, we found that health information recorded during health checks varied across practices. The main implications from our study are that health checks for patients with a learning disability can be effective in preventing some unnecessary hospital visits, and that practices should be encouraged to ensure that more eligible patients receive them.

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