

# Quality and safety between ward and board: a biography of artefacts study

Justin Keen,<sup>1\*</sup> Emma Nicklin,<sup>1</sup> Andrew Long,<sup>2</sup>  
Rebecca Randell,<sup>2</sup> Nyantara Wickramasekera,<sup>3</sup>  
Cara Gates,<sup>4</sup> Claire Ginn,<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth McGinnis,<sup>6</sup>  
Sean Willis<sup>6</sup> and Jackie Whittle<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Leeds Institute of Health Sciences, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

<sup>2</sup>School of Healthcare, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

<sup>3</sup>School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

<sup>4</sup>School of Health and Community Studies, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

<sup>5</sup>NHS England, Leeds, UK

<sup>6</sup>Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Leeds, UK

\*Corresponding author [j.keen@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:j.keen@leeds.ac.uk)

**Declared competing interests of authors:** none

Published June 2018

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr06220

## Plain English summary

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Health Services and Delivery Research 2018; Vol. 6: No. 22

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr06220

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## Plain English summary

There have been concerns about the quality and safety of NHS hospital services since 2000.

A series of government policies and official reports has argued that doctors, nurses and hospital managers have not had enough information about the quality and safety of services in their hospitals. As a result, problems developed on wards and in other parts of hospitals, and had got out of hand before decisive action was taken to address them.

Our study tested the idea that hospital staff can spot problems quickly if they have access to better information and can make sure that patients are not harmed. Hospitals have been implementing computer systems to provide this information.

We undertook two initial surveys, and then a detailed study of the uses of quality and safety data, in four acute NHS hospitals. The detailed study included observation of the ways in which nurses and other staff use information in the course of their work. It also involved observing meetings during which hospital managers discussed the quality and safety of services, and undertaking interviews with hospital staff who collect and use information.

We found that staff on wards had detailed information about patients that they could use to make sure that those patients were receiving the care they needed. Senior hospital managers had access to information about the quality and safety of services across their hospitals, which they used to identify areas in which problems might be developing. Equally, we found that trust information systems tended to be fragmented, and trusts were required to collect data for national agencies ahead of the information that they needed to collect for their own needs.

These changes were made as part of a broader set of initiatives to improve the quality and safety of services. Our evidence suggests that better information, along with these broader changes, has led to measurable improvements in the quality and safety of services at the four hospitals studied.

# Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)

ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

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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 preceding programmes as project number 13/07/68. The contractual start date was in July 2014. The final report began editorial review in January 2017 and was accepted for publication in June 2017. 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 and Social Care. 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 and Social Care.

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