The 10-year impact of a ward-level quality improvement intervention in acute hospitals: a multiple methods study

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Plain English summary

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This study investigated a programme called ‘Productive Ward: Releasing Time to Care’™ (PW), which aimed to help nurses make their hospital wards run more efficiently and give them more time for patient care. PW was first tried in the NHS in 2007. The majority of trusts chose to adopt it, many supported by a share of the £50M made available.

The study tried to find out whether or not the programme and the way in which it was implemented led to lasting improvements. This was done by conducting surveys of directors of nursing and hospital leads for PW; carrying out telephone interviews with former PW leads; and, in six acute hospitals, interviewing staff and looking at what goes on in wards.

Overall, the impact of PW was reported as positive, although some elements had been more useful than others. Hospitals had very few ‘hard data’ (figures before and after doing PW) to prove impacts, but interviewees said that PW had improved things for staff and patients.

Although the majority of hospitals in the survey had stopped using the full programme, nearly all reported that at least some elements of PW were still being used. It had also influenced quality improvement strategies in nearly half of the hospitals in the survey.

There was no available evidence of a sustained increase in the time nurses spend on direct patient care or improvements in the experiences of staff and/or patients, but PW has had a lasting impact on ward layout (including storage and equipment) and on some ward practices. To a lesser degree, it was still helping ward staff to think about working productively. The findings from the study will help managers, doctors and nurses to sustain the benefits they reap from using PW or other improvement programmes like it.
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This report

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