Developing and evaluating packages to support implementation of quality indicators in general practice: the ASPIRE research programme, including two cluster RCTs

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Plain English summary

Clinical research identifies ways to improve patient care that can help people live longer and better. However, recommendations from research do not always become part of everyday patient care. Providing health-care staff and services with recommendations from clinical guidelines to inform clinical decision-making is often not enough by itself to change how care is delivered. Furthermore, general practice, where 9 out of 10 NHS patient contacts occur, struggles to apply many different guidelines within limited time and resources.

We developed and tested an improvement package to help general practices adapt their care according to one of four guideline recommendations.

We identified recommendations that were most likely to make a real difference to patient care. We measured how closely practices followed these recommendations and found that practices varied a lot. We adapted the package for use in one of four topics: diabetes control, blood pressure control, stroke prevention and ‘risky prescribing’ (to reduce particular combinations of medicines that may cause harm). We used the play of chance to assign general practices to one package for each topic. We found that only the risky prescribing package improved patient care and provided good value for money. We also found that the improvement packages were often not delivered or used as we had intended, and that professionals found it easier to change some types of clinical practice (e.g. prescribing) than others.

Our findings will inform practical guidance to help general practices improve patient care.
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