Remediation programmes for practising doctors to restore patient safety: the RESTORE realist review

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Plain English summary

The RESTORE realist review

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Plain English summary

All of us, as patients, expect our doctors to be competent. If they are not, we expect them to be stopped from practising. However, there is a wider problem that is more difficult to address, and that is doctors who underperform. These doctors do not need to stop practising but, to keep patients safe, they need help. This could be through retraining in a certain area, or perhaps addressing underlying physical or mental health problems. Bringing a doctor's performance back to an acceptable standard is called 'remediation'. Remediation covers a range of interventions aimed at improving performance, from a 'quiet word in the ear' to more formal training programmes.

There is a variety of literature relating to the remediation of doctors. To combine this literature in an understandable way, we followed an approach called 'realist review'. This allowed us to analyse a wide range of relevant literature to better understand how and why remediation works for some doctors. It also allowed us to include the perspectives of stakeholders (e.g. those involved in delivering remediation for doctors, those receiving remediation, patient representatives, academics and medical educators).

We found the following:

- Remediation works when it develops a doctor's insight and motivation, and supports behaviour change.
- Ensuring that doctors have a safe space to talk about their performance issues, where they do not feel judged, was important, as was having a neutral person to support them through the process.
- Involving the remediating doctor in remediation planning can provide a perceived sense of control in the process. This, along with identifying the cause, goal-setting, destigmatising remediation and clarity of consequences, helps motivate doctors to change.
- Sustained change may be facilitated by practising new behaviours and skills and through guided reflection.

The report provides recommendations for policy-makers and leaders of remediation programmes on the design of remediation interventions.

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