

GPs' involvement to improve care quality in care homes in the UK: a realist review

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Close working between general practitioners and care homes is crucial for good-quality care. In the UK, general practitioners provide medical care to residents and control access to other health services. We aimed to summarise how general practitioners work with care homes to improve care.

We used a realist review to summarise improvement initiatives. This method suited the complex nature of improvement initiatives in care homes and the variations in the way that general practitioners were involved. We searched for studies carried out in residential and nursing homes for older people in the UK, and we investigated any interventions involving general practitioners. We conducted several searches of academic databases and publicly available reports. Interviews with general practitioners, and consultation meetings with general practitioners and care home staff, were also carried out.

We selected 30 articles about medication review and end-of-life care and developed two overarching theories. Theory 1 described where a general practitioner played a supportive role while another professional, such as a pharmacist, led the initiative. Negotiation was required to match improvement initiatives to the variety of ways in which general practitioners worked. We found evidence that this could improve prescribing and end-of-life care.

Theory 2 was about national or regional programmes, led by prominent general practitioners, that aim to improve end-of-life care in a way that is consistent with the working patterns of general practitioners. There was evidence that these resulted in clear specification of the role that general practitioners should play, but there was limited detail about the role general practitioners actually play in improvement.

In conclusion, only a small number of studies described general practitioners' role in improvement in care homes. General practitioners make valuable contributions to improvement, but they are often in supporting other professionals, who take the lead. Future research should explore the exact function of general practitioners in improving care for residents.

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