

Towards achieving interorganisational collaboration between health-care providers: a realist evidence synthesis

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Plain language summary

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What was the question?

How can the collaboration between health-care providers be improved?

What did we do?

There are continuing concerns about poor patient care across the NHS. One of the ways in which governments have tried to solve these issues is by getting services to work together, rather than separately, to solve any problems. The aim of our review is to learn about how, why and when different approaches to working together – which we call interorganisational collaboration – can be used to improve the performance of NHS providers. We reviewed published evidence and carried out interviews with NHS staff. We also carried out interviews and a focus group with patient and public representatives.

What did we find?

Our review finds that interorganisational collaborations can work well when a series of elements are in place, which includes the need to build trust between everyone involved. Having a belief in the collaboration is also needed to help inspire others to get involved. To try and reduce possible problems, setting priorities and having clear methods to show how improvements can be achieved are important, as well as having an agreed contract in place to ensure that any conflicts are resolved.

If done well, collaboration can improve resource allocation, coordination, communication and shared learning about best practice.

What does this mean?

Our review provides valuable evidence of how different approaches to interorganisational collaboration can be used by NHS providers to work together to improve services in different situations. Our review provides different options for organisations to reflect on how well they are collaborating, which includes the involvement of key stakeholders, such as patients, the public and communities.

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