

Collaborative care intervention for individuals with severe mental illness: the PARTNERS2 programme including complex intervention development and cluster RCT

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

Over 7 years, the PARTNERS2 research programme co-developed and evaluated a new way of working to support people with schizophrenia, bipolar or other psychoses in order to fill the gap in provision between primary care and secondary mental health services. The intervention involved a 'care partner' and followed a collaborative care approach. We completed several studies, including a full randomised controlled trial, in four sites: Birmingham, Cornwall, Plymouth and Somerset.

We found the following:

- Analysis of secondary care records showed that many individuals received a lot of specialist care contacts that are not visible in primary care records.
- Our outcomes work for bipolar identified several themes, including personal recovery, connectedness, clinical recovery and mental health/well-being. These helped us choose quality of life as the primary outcome for the PARTNERS2 trial.
- Our preliminary work developing the 'care partner' collaborative care coaching approach was well received but showed problems with delivery, including supervision.
- The full trial was completed despite the COVID-19 pandemic but with fewer participants (a total of 198) than intended. No differences were found between those receiving and those not receiving PARTNERS care. Some participants received little or no intervention, partly due to care partner absences. The care partner approach was appreciated by some service users whom we interviewed for feedback. They described positive benefits of working with a 'professional friend' but only more limited examples of longer-term impact. Care partners sometimes appeared to take time to learn to put joined-up individualised care into practice.

Although the PARTNERS2 trial produced a neutral result – meaning that people were no worse or no better as a result of receiving primary-care-based collaborative care – there are both practical and theoretical reasons that are likely to explain this. As the PARTNERS approach aligns well with current mental health policy, we are continuing to test the approach in practice.

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