

281: THE MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY IN PRIMARY CARE TRUSTS IN THE BRITISH NHS

Pickard S., Sheaff W. R., Dowling B.

Objective:

To link the various models of governance found in Primary Care Trusts (PCTs)- comprising differing dimensions of network, quasi-market and hierarchical attributes - in the British NHS with organisational management of quality, focusing on a) involvement in rank-and-file GPs and b) patients/ residents, in this process

Methods:

We will be presenting interim results from a three-year longitudinal study designed to capture evolving processes in the newly established Primary Care Organisations (PCOs) in England for implementing new guidance on quality management issues by central government, in particular National Service Frameworks (NSFs). Methods include semi-structured qualitative interviews with key stakeholders in managers, rank-and-file GPs and lay members of the PCT together with analysis of primary and secondary data (including policy documents, PCT purchasing plans and service contracts and data abstracted from NPCRDC's national database on PCTs). Nine PCTs were selected for this study in a purposive sample contrasted in terms of the three dimensions of governance identified, namely network, quasi-market and hierarchical structures.

Results:

Interim results suggest that the effects of governance structures on organisational management of quality are significant. In particular, hierarchical governance models involve stronger control by the PCT and weaker involvement of GPs and patients/ residents, which is contrasted with the higher patient/ resident involvement in quasi-markets and higher involvement of GPs in networked structures, with wide-ranging implications for quality management which will be of interest to policy makers and practitioners, as well as an academic audience.

Conclusions:

The aim of recent government policy on quality management, in particular through the medium of NSFs, is to change the everyday working practice of individual clinicians in ensuring a consistent standard of quality across PCOs, implemented via PCTs. In addition, national policy indicates that patients and residents are to be involved in this process. Our research indicates that organisational management of quality is strongly linked to the governance characteristics highlighted above, with implications for policy and practice.