

Design and evaluation of an interactive quality dashboard for national clinical audit data: a realist evaluation

Rebecca Randell,^{1,2*} Natasha Alvarado,^{1,2}
Mai Elshehaly,^{2,3} Lynn McVey,^{1,2} Robert M West,⁴
Patrick Doherty,⁵ Dawn Dowding,⁶
Amanda J Farrin,⁷ Richard G Feltbower,⁸
Chris P Gale,⁸ Joanne Greenhalgh,⁹ Julia Lake,¹⁰
Mamas Mamas,¹¹ Rebecca Walwyn⁷
and Roy A Ruddle¹²

¹Faculty of Health Studies, University of Bradford, Bradford, UK

²Wolfson Centre for Applied Health Research, Bradford, UK

³Faculty of Engineering and Informatics, University of Bradford, Bradford, UK

⁴Leeds Institute of Health Sciences, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

⁵Department of Health Sciences, University of York, York, UK

⁶School of Health Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

⁷Leeds Institute of Clinical Trials Research, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

⁸Leeds Institute of Cardiovascular and Metabolic Medicine, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

⁹School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

¹⁰Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Leeds, UK

¹¹Primary Care and Health Sciences, Keele University, Keele, UK

¹²School of Computing, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

*Corresponding author r.randell@bradford.ac.uk

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

A quality dashboard for national clinical audit data

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Plain English summary

Over 100 national audits are undertaken in the NHS each year, with each focusing on a different area of care. The national audits provide clinicians and managers with information about whether or not a hospital is meeting the expected standards of care quality and how the care provided compares with that offered by other hospitals. This can encourage improvement. However, some clinicians and managers find it difficult to make use of national audit information. Dashboards present information as graphs and are thought to make it easier for people to understand information.

We worked with staff from five NHS hospitals. We interviewed staff to gather their ideas about how national audit information is used, the challenges in using this information and how these challenges might be overcome. We learned that the information is mainly used by clinical teams and that the information is more likely to be used where teams have audit support staff who can create graphs of the information. It was also important for the information to be recent and perceived as accurate, and for the reported information to be considered as relevant and meaningful.

We used this information to design a dashboard and develop a plan for its introduction. Staff suggested that 'champions', e-bulletins and demonstrations, and quick reference tools were needed.

We introduced the dashboard into five hospitals and evaluated its use over 1 year. Changes were needed so that the graphs presented information in ways that staff were used to and clear labels had to be added so that staff were confident about what information was being displayed. The dashboard was most useful where staff had previously found it difficult to use national audit information. In such situations, our findings provide some evidence to suggest that the dashboard can increase staff members' use of audit information, reduce time spent in preparation of reports and support improvements in data quality.

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