



A review of specific factors influencing complex interventions in care homes

Summary written by: Dr Gizdem Akdur

Email: g.akdur@herts.ac.uk

Designed and edited by: Jo Morton and Chloe Bennett



Introduction

Care homes play a vital role in supporting citizens with complex needs. Care homes are complex organisations supporting older people with a variety of needs. Conducting research can have its challenges. In a care home, the people, work practices, technologies, the physical environment, and the care home culture can affect how well an intervention is understood. The process evaluations built into randomised controlled trials (RCT) explore the relationship, similarities and differences between an intervention as planned and as implemented. We aimed to explore the challenges of implementing complex interventions in care homes and provide recommendations for research and care home teams.



Definitions

What is implementation?

Implementation is the process of carrying out of planned activities, such as a research intervention designed to improve the care of residents.

What is an intervention?

An intervention is a combination of strategies designed to improve health status in care homes by changing how care is organised and delivered.

What is a process evaluation?

A process evaluation of an RCT describes the services, activities, policies, and procedures that were needed to deliver the trial intervention. It wants to know if the intervention being tested was implemented as planned.

What is a randomised controlled trial?

A randomised control trial (RCT) is a type of trial that is viewed as the best way to test the effectiveness of new interventions.

Why is it needed?



Research and especially randomised control trials (RCT) are expensive, and many care home studies have resulted in neutral findings. It is unclear if this is because the interventions are inappropriate or because of how they are implemented in a care home setting. This review looks at those factors that influence the outcomes of complex interventions in care homes.

What did we do?

The review included 33 process evaluations of care home studies published between 2005-2019, conducted in high-income countries. We looked for common themes between care home process evaluations, and devised recommendations on how to mitigate failures in the planning of studies and their interventions. We grouped together barriers and enablers likely to affect the outcomes in care home research.

What did we find?

- 1) Research teams need to assess how their research will have an impact on the work practices of staff in care homes.
- 2) Factors as high staff turnover, changes in care home management, and limited resources often lead to changes from how the research project was originally designed to take place.
- 3) Maintaining care home staff engagement over the lifetime of the study and avoiding the drift in staff interest should be taken seriously by researchers.
- 4) Researchers must prioritise involvement of staff in the process of intervention and change.

What does this mean?

We provide recommendations that researchers and care home teams can use to support the planning of complex interventions in care home studies. We recommend that any proposed intervention has to be co-produced with researchers and staff in care homes. There needs to be a clear aim and adequate resources to incorporate the proposed intervention within existing routines and care practices of staff.

