

OP12.3

What makes collaborative care for depression and anxiety work in general practice? - A literature study

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Background: Collaborative care is an increasingly popular approach for improving quality of care for people with mental health problems through an intensified and structured collaboration between primary care providers and health professionals with specialized psychiatric expertise. Trials have shown significant positive effects for patients suffering from depression but since collaborative care is a complex intervention, it is important to understand the factors which affect its implementation.

Aim: to synthesize and review evidence from qualitative studies of enablers and barriers to implementing collaborative care for patients with anxiety and depression.

Methods: We developed a comprehensive search strategy in cooperation with a research librarian and performed a search in five databases. All authors independently screened titles and abstracts and reviewed full-text articles. Our subsequent analysis employed a thematic approach based on Normalization Process Theory (NPT).

Results: We included 17 studies in our review 16 of which were conducted in the USA or the UK. We identified several barriers and enablers within the four major analytical dimensions of NPT. Securing buy-in among primary care providers was found to be critical but sometimes difficult. Enablers included physician champions, reimbursement for extra work, and feedback on the effectiveness of collaborative care. The social and professional skills of the care managers seemed critical for integrating collaborative care in the primary health care clinic. Daily enactment was also found to be facilitated by co-location.

Conclusions: The following areas require special attention when planning collaborative care interventions: effective educational programs, especially for care managers; issues of reimbursement in relation to primary care providers; good systems for communication and monitoring; and promoting face-to-face interaction between care managers and physicians, preferably through co-location.