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The development of quality circles for quality improvement in Europe: a mixed methods study involving 26 European countries - Workshop

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Background: Quality circles (QCs) are commonly used as a tool in primary health care in Europe to consider and improve standard practice over time. They represent a complex social intervention that occurs within the fast-changing system of primary health care. QCs were first established in Canada and the Netherlands from where they spread to other European countries. This workshop aims to increase knowledge about this tool in primary health care in Europe and adds data to the study that updates Beyer et al 2003 on this topic.

Method: Experts from 26 European countries, belonging to the European Society of Quality and Safety in Family Medicine (EQUIP), completed an online survey documenting the number and objectives of QCs in their country, sources of support, incentives and didactic methods used. The experts then took part in semi-structured online interviews. During the workshop at the WONCA conference, ad hoc interviews among participants will provide the study with complementary qualitative data from a variety of family physicians who are not experts in this field. These interviews will be conducted by participants on each other simultaneously under facilitation of group leaders. Descriptive statistical techniques are used to analyse quantitative data and thematic analyses are used to analyse the qualitative data.

Results: Findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses are synthesized to illustrate how common QCs are, their aims, organization, type of facilitation, incentives, level of autonomy, support, use of data and didactic methods. Local projects and their further development clarify quantitative data.

Conclusion: Triangulation using quantitative data from the online survey and qualitative data from semi-structured online interviews as well as qualitative data from non-expert family physicians participating in interviews will validate the results of the study.