Identifying high-value, cost-conscious care carriers in projects initiated by Dutch medical residents: a realist evaluation

Background

- The high quality care in the Netherlands is excellent compared to other countries. However, the country is also one of the top spenders on healthcare worldwide. As healthcare costs are rising unsustainably, the consequences of this trend are linked to the endangerment of accessibility of healthcare in the future.

- Many opportunities to control healthcare costs can be found at micro level, namely with physicians. Several organizations are trying to address this problem among doctors by introducing the concept of high-value, cost-conscious care into the medical field. High-value, cost-conscious care is about preserving or increasing the high quality of care, whilst simultaneously reducing costs. One of these organizations, het Bewustzijnsproject, stimulates medical residents to create their own high-value, cost-conscious care projects in their department.

- The aim of this research is to identify high-value, cost-conscious care carriers by evaluating high-value, cost-conscious care projects initiated by Dutch medical residents.

Theoretical framework

Context: A project that focuses on creating a platform that makes it easier for specialists from different disciplines to join forces and tackle medical problems together.

Mechanism: If medical forces are bundled, the 'gray area' that exists at the moment can be removed because doctors know now exactly which specialists can treat a specific injury or disease. This way, patients end up at the right place with the right doctor much faster.

Outcome: Unnecessary medical actions or care costs can be avoided, because doctors are collaborating their expertise and helping each other with medical cases.

Methods

Qualitative research

Semi-structured interviews were held with:
- 12 medical residents
- 1 physician
- 1 educator

Evaluation of high-value, cost-conscious care projects initiated by medical residents through a realist evaluation. Realist evaluation assesses the questions 'how and why does this work (or not work)?'

Results

Carriers that stimulate high-value, cost-conscious care

1. Creating awareness on delivering high-value, cost-conscious care
2. Having a supportive environment towards high-value, cost-conscious care
3. Project-based working: having the knowledge and experience to conduct and execute projects

Conclusion and Discussion

Introducing high-value, cost-conscious care into medical field is difficult due to the persistency and complexity of inducing a systematic innovation in the current Dutch healthcare system.

Executing these carriers does not mean that high-value, cost-conscious care is achieved. However, if future policymakers want to develop interventions aimed at the promotion of high-value, cost-conscious care, these carriers have to be taken into account.

Strengths of this study:
- Variety of projects included
- Use of realist evaluation as a method. This helped us to understand why a certain project works in which context, under what mechanisms and therefore what the outcomes were.

Next steps

Further research needs to focus on understanding why physicians want or do not want to engage in high-value, cost-conscious care, in order to change the currently complex healthcare system.