Implementation strategies to increase smoking cessation treatment provision in primary care: a systematic review of observational studies

BERNADETT E. TILDY1,2, ANN MCNEILL1,2, PARVATI R. PERMAN-HOWE1,2, LEONIE S. BROSE1,2

1Addictions Department, King’s College London, London, United Kingdom
2Shaping Public Health policies To Reduce inequalities and harm (SPECTRUM) Consortium, United Kingdom

Presenter’s email: bernadett.tildy@kcl.ac.uk

Introduction and Aims:

‘Implementation strategies’ are methods/techniques to enhance the adoption, implementation, and sustainability of a clinical program/practice. Aim: To identify implementation, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of implementation strategies aiming to increase smoking cessation treatment provision in the primary care setting, and any perceived facilitators and barriers for effectiveness.

Design and Methods:

Seven databases, and three grey literature sources were searched from inception to April 2021. Studies were included if they evaluated implementation on a national or a state-wide scale, contained practitioner performance and patient smoking outcome measures. Studies were assessed using the Risk Of Bias In Non-randomized Studies of Interventions (ROBINS-I) tool. A narrative synthesis was conducted.

Results:

Of 49 included papers, half were of moderate/low risk of bias. The implementation strategies identified involved utilising financial strategies, changing infrastructure, training and educating stakeholders, and engaging consumers. The first three strategies increased the provision of cessation advice in primary care but no intervention had high-quality evidence of impact on patient smoking cessation. No studies assessed cost-effectiveness. External policies/incentives (wider tobacco control measures and funding for public health and cessation clinics) were key facilitators. Time and financial constraints, lack of free cessation medications and follow-up, deprioritisation and unclear targets in primary care, lack of knowledge of healthcare professionals, and unclear messaging to patients about cessation were key barriers.

Discussions and Conclusions:

Some implementation strategies increased the rate of delivery of cessation advice in primary care, but there was no high-quality evidence showing an increase in quit attempts or smoking cessation.

Implications for Translational Research:

We recommend assessing the impact of implementation strategies on both primary care practitioner performance as well as smoking outcomes, and using implementation science methods to verify that the components of the Very Brief Advice for smoking cessation intervention are optimised. Barriers to effectiveness identified in this review should be reduced.

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