



Medical and Health Professional Education  
Best Evidence Medical Education

## **BEME Spotlight 46**

### **Workplace Learning through Collaboration in Primary Healthcare: A BEME Realist Review of What Works, for Whom, and in What Circumstances.**

Mertens F, de Groot E, Meijer L, Wens J, Cherry G, Deveugele M, Damoiseaux R, Stes A, Pype P

#### **Review citation**

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#### **Review website**

<https://bemecollaboration.org/Published+Reviews/BEME+Guide+No+46/>

#### **Keywords**

workplace learning, collaboration, interprofessional collaboration, primary healthcare, realist review

#### **Headline conclusions**

The results of our review indicate that interprofessional WPL through collaboration in primary healthcare is multifaceted. Our findings indicate that WPL does indeed take place when primary care professionals work together, within the same profession or with professionals from other disciplines, and that the mechanisms involved do not differ in major ways from those known from studies about other professionals, both inside and outside healthcare. As such, WPL should be considered to be an essential part of the continuing professional development continuum during lifelong practice.

#### **Background and context**

Changes in healthcare practice toward more proactive clinical, organisational and interprofessional working require primary healthcare professionals to learn continuously from each other through collaboration. Workplace learning (WPL) has been broadly defined as 'learning taking place at work, through work and for work'. It has been studied extensively during undergraduate medical education, far less for primary healthcare professionals after graduation. To acquire clarity on what works, for whom and in what circumstances for WPL of collaborating healthcare professionals, realist review is an appropriate review methodology.

## Review objectives

The review objective was to better understand the process of WPL through collaboration in primary healthcare and the conditions influencing WPL.

The research questions addressed were:

- Who learns during WPL through collaboration in primary healthcare?
- When does this learning take place?
- How does this learning occur?
- What is being learned?

## Review methodology

**Search Strategy:** Following scoping searches, five electronic databases were searched from January 1990 to December 2015 for relevant grey and published literature written in English: French, German and Dutch. Search syntaxes combined synonyms of a combination of the components 'learning', 'collaboration' and 'primary healthcare'.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:** Studies were included if they clearly described the learning process and of healthcare professionals. Studies were excluded if they exclusively described classroom-based education, if the study population consisted solely of students or hospital healthcare professionals, if the learning context and processes were insufficiently described, if they were reported as dissertations or books or not electronically available.

**Data Extraction:** Study data were coded, extracted and analysed in accordance with relevance to the review questions. A set of statements, based on the findings of the scoping searches and a stakeholders meeting, was used as a coding tree to analyse the papers. Sections functioning as Context (C), Mechanism (M) or Outcome (O) were identified.

**Data Synthesis:** Comparisons between different C's and M's were made. Interpretation of the results was done in alternating pairs, discussed within the author group and triangulated with stakeholders' views.

## Implications for practice

- Primary healthcare professionals are often unaware that they learn through collaboration. Professionals can both learn and facilitate others' learning. Making this more explicit can improve WPL.
- Managers in primary healthcare should ensure protected learning time. Workplace's layout affects learning. Managers need to organise the workplace to enhance communication and casual encounters.
- Healthcare educators should be aware that discussions, asking questions and feedback during work provides affordances for learning. Curricula should emphasise the importance of this kind of learning. Interprofessional modules, focusing on collaboration should be included in undergraduate education.
- Most of the included studies had individuals as unit of analysis. We recommend that researchers focus on supplementing current research with studies on organisational learning in primary healthcare.

## References

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