

A realist evaluation of a collaborative model to support research co-production in long-term care settings in England

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Background:

There are many gaps between researchers' activities and the needs of **people working, living in and visiting care homes**. The *EXCHANGE Collaboration* (The University of Exeter Care Homes Knowledge Collaboration) brings together researchers and care home stakeholders to **improve mutual understanding of evidence-use in care homes** and to generate research that directly addresses the needs of care home stakeholders.

Objectives:

We conducted an internal, **realist-informed evaluation** of the collaboration to understand *where and how* the project had done well (and where it had struggled) in meeting its aims.



Methods:

- ✓ **Observation** of events and activities.
- ✓ **Documentary analysis** of risk/issues logs, knowledge broker journal and other relevant project paperwork.
- ✓ **Semi-structured interviews** with care home providers, family members and researchers.
- ✓ **Framework Method analysis**, focusing on areas allowing us to develop a theory of how the collaboration could have or did achieve change.

2020-2022

Limitations:

- **Limited resources** of care home sector further restricted through pandemic.
- The **reach and embeddedness** of collaboration was restricted due to the pandemic. Although, online format enabled wider geographical reach.
- **Issues in translating practice concerns** into researchable questions.
- **Long-term sustainability** complicated without further funding.

"I think it felt very much like a team effort, I felt very listened to"

- Family member

"now if I'm looking at an issue in my rest home then I'm going to go and see what research has already been done"

- Care home provider

Results:

Our collaboration developed the capacity of care home stakeholders to engage with research and enhanced researchers' understanding of care homes, by:

- the inclusion of **diverse care home stakeholders** (care home providers, staff, family members and residents);
- developing **equitable relationships** between researchers and care home stakeholders;
- stakeholder participation in project running/decision-making;
- **practice-needs** focused goals (rather than academic-needs focused);
- **co-design/co-delivery** of workshops enhanced accessibility.

Factors reducing collaborator inequalities:

- family members and care home providers attending delivery group meetings;
- **all participants were financially compensated.**

The collaboration has facilitated **multi-directional knowledge flow** with the support of a **knowledge broker** who acted as mediator between diverse stakeholders.

The collaboration facilitated identification of care home stakeholders' uncertainties which were turned into **future research questions**.

Project **adaptability/flexibility** enabled it to continue throughout the pandemic.

"it's been good to get people from all aspects of care together"

- Family member

"for me what I learned about was what it's like to be a worker in a care home"

- Researcher

Let's EXCHANGE!

MAKING SENSE OF CARE HOMES

Conclusion:

Our study suggests **academic-practice collaborations** can be effective in helping support care homes to **develop capacity to use evidence, mobilise knowledge, and identify research needs**, to ultimately benefit the health and wellbeing of people working, living in and visiting care homes.