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Fostering the implementation of clinical practice guidelines by training facilitators

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Background: In 1999, under the auspices of an independent health authority, the regional associations of doctors in non-hospital practice in France set up a voluntary practice appraisal scheme. Between 1999 and 2004, doctors (“facilitators”) were recruited, trained in clinical auditing, and approved with a view to helping practitioners adopt standards derived from clinical practice guidelines (CPGs). Each facilitator was provided with a ready-to-use kit.

Purpose: To review facilitator performance and involvement in quality initiatives.

Methods: Questionnaires were sent out (in 2004 and in 2009) to the first groups of facilitators to be trained asking them about practitioners’ choice of standards and their own involvement in quality initiatives.

Results: A total of 229 facilitators provided support to 1352 practitioners (852 general practitioners (63%); 500 specialists (37%)) in their practice appraisal, either on a one-to-one basis (840; 62%) or in groups (512; 38%). Standards derived from 78 CPGs were implemented. The 6 preferred topics were patients’ medical records in primary care, safe drug prescribing in the elderly (over 70 years old), hypertension, diabetes, back pain, and vaccinations. The facilitators were involved, to varying degrees, in continuous medical education, care networks, peer review groups, and teaching.

Discussion: Practitioners prefer to appraise their practice on the basis of CPGs that concern highly prevalent public issues for which long-term validated data are available. The facilitators provided highly welcome support to a large number of practitioners. They not only fulfilled their initial mission of helping in the clinical audit but, as a result of their involvement in a variety of quality initiatives, were able to foster a “quality culture”. The limitation of this scheme is that it does not enable the measurement of the impact of changes in practice.