Mechanisms and context factors important for successful implementation of an improvement intervention concerning medicines use in residential facilities for the disabled.

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Background Work procedures around medicines in residential facilities for the disabled are prone to errors. To improve patient safety, an improvement intervention consisting of a competence development programme followed by implementation of a medication bundle to achieve safer work procedures was developed and implemented in 35 facilities in 7 municipalities.

Purpose To identify mechanisms and context factors important for successful implementation and sustainability of an improvement intervention aimed at ensuring patient safety in residential facilities for the disabled.

Method Realist evaluation was used to identify the underlying mechanisms explaining how the outcomes were caused and the influence of context in the three municipalities reaching the best implementation results. Based on a literature study and previous experience, the initial programme theory was developed, describing how the intervention was expected to lead to its effects and in which conditions it should do so. Qualitative data on mechanisms and context factors were gathered through focus group interviews with managers and staff in the 3 municipalities, supplemented with single interviews with the 3 municipal improvement advisors. All interviews were semi-structured using the programme theory as a framework, and analysed using the template analysis style. The revised programme theory was validated through a focus group interview with the three improvement advisors.

Findings The important mechanisms identified were 1) consistency between the intervention and the organizational culture and strategy; 2) believing that change is needed and actually deciding to change; 3) expecting and believing that the intervention will lead to positive results; 4) capacity building matching the demands of the intervention, meaning that both the necessary competencies and resources were available; 5) management support; 6) spreading the "good stories" demonstrating the advantages of the intervention; 7) making improvement data visible at all levels in the organization; 8) monitoring unexpected barriers, and 9) organizational anchoring of the intervention. Important context factors influencing implementation were organizational changes such as merging of facilities, changes in management at the municipal or facility level, municipal cost-savings, and difficult cooperation with general practitioners about the medication bundle.

Conclusion Knowledge on the revealed mechanisms and context factors are important when spreading a similar improvement intervention to other residential facilities and other municipalities, as careful consideration of such factors are a prerequisite for successful implementation and sustainability.