

Educational meetings and workshops for healthcare professionals:

What are the effects?



Educational meetings include courses, seminars and workshops in various formats. Doctors and other healthcare professionals often use educational meetings as part of their continuing medical education. Medical societies or employers in the health care system also use educational meetings to present new knowledge or new types of care and to encourage best practice. These types of meetings can vary a lot. For instance, some may be very interactive while other may be lecture-based. The type of people leading the meeting and the number of people who attend also varies.

But do these types of meetings lead to change? The review authors assessed whether healthcare professionals who went to educational meetings were more likely to follow the practices recommended to them. In addition, the review authors assessed whether the meetings led to any improvements in patients' health.

What are the key messages in this review?

Educational meetings alone or as the main part of a larger strategy are probably better than no strategy at improving healthcare professionals' practice and patient health. They may also be better than other types of behaviour change strategies at improving healthcare professionals' practice. But we don't know if some types of educational meetings are better than others.

Who is this summary for?

Implementation agencies, ministries of health, programme managers, and other stakeholders who are considering the use of continuing medical education for healthcare professionals.

What did the review look for?

A recent Cochrane Review assessed the effects of educational meetings on healthcare professional practice and patient health (Forsetlund 2021). The review authors collected and analysed all relevant studies to answer this question and included 215 studies in the review.

How up-to-date was this review?

This review includes studies published up to November 2016. The review authors decided not to perform subsequent searches because they judged that new evidence would be unlikely to change the findings for the main comparison.

The review authors included 215 relevant studies involving more than 28 000 healthcare professionals.

Most of the studies were from North America or Europe, although many other countries were also represented. Most studies took place in primary care or community-based care settings such as nursing homes, but many studies also took place in hospitals and other secondary care settings. Most of the healthcare professionals in the studies were doctors, but the studies also looked at other groups, including nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists and dentists. The review shows the following:

Educational meetings alone or as the main part of a larger package, compared to no meetings:

- Healthcare professionals are probably more likely to follow recommended practices (moderate certainty evidence)
- This probably slightly improves patient health (moderate certainty evidence)

Educational meetings alone, compared to other strategies to change healthcare professionals' behaviour:

- Healthcare professionals may be more likely to follow recommended practices (low certainty evidence)
- We don't know what the effects are on patient health because no relevant studies were found

Interactive educational meetings compared with lecture-based educational meetings:

- We don't know what the effects are on healthcare professionals' practice or patients' health because the certainty of the evidence is very low.

Any other comparison of different types of educational meetings:

- We don't know what the effects are on healthcare professionals' practice or patients' health because the certainty of the evidence is very low.

New studies that assess the effects of educational meetings alone, or as the main part of a larger package, compared to no meetings are not likely to change the results of this review. The review authors therefore decided not to update the searches from 2016. However, we do need more studies that compare different types of educational meetings.

The results presented in this summary are from a Cochrane Review. This summary does NOT include recommendations. The review authors have searched for, assessed and summarised relevant studies of effectiveness using a systematic and predefined approach.

The review authors assessed the certainty of each finding using a systematic approach called GRADE. GRADE uses criteria such as the risk of systematic errors (bias) in the finding of each study and the risk of errors due to the play of chance (because of few people or events in the studies).



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Reference

The information for this summary is taken from the following Cochrane Review: Forsetlund L, O'Brien MA, Forsén L, Mwai L, Reinar LM, Okwen MP, Horsley T, Rose CJ. Continuing education meetings and workshops: effects on professional practice and healthcare outcomes. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2021, Issue 9. Art. No.: CD003030. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD003030.pub3. Accessed 16 September 2021. This review is an update of an earlier Cochrane Review.

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