

## Costs, Quality and Outcomes

Ann Netten, Karen Jones and Sima Sandhu

A principal objective of this programme is to provide an insight into factors associated with efficiency and quality of community care services. There are a number of stages to the work: measurement of cost, quality and outcome of services, investigation of the relationship between cost and quality, exploration of cost and quality performance indicator variation. Our first priority was to address home care services.

### Quality of home care services

Promoting independence for all older people continues to be a key policy objective (Cm 6499, 2005). Home care services play an important role in this, since the quality of these services fundamentally affects the quality of service users' lives. To reflect the continued importance of learning from the perspective of all service users, all councils are required to undertake annual surveys of service users. In 2002–2003 the first survey of older users of home care took place. A full questionnaire had been developed for this purpose (Qureshi and Rowlands, 2004) but only four questions from this were compulsory for CSSRs to include in their surveys, two of which were considered as Best Value performance indicators. These questions were:

*Satisfaction* – Overall how satisfied are you with the help from Social Services that you receive in your own home? (Best Value performance indicator)

*Social Services contact* – Does anyone contact you from Social Services to check you are satisfied with the home care that you receive?

*Suitable times* – Do care workers come at times that suit you?

*Changes* – If you ask for changes in the help you are given, are those changes made? (Best Value performance indicator)

All 150 councils with social services responsibilities (CSSRs) were invited to participate in an extension to the user experience survey (UES), using an adapted version of the full questionnaire. The key objectives of the extension study were:

- To examine whether the BVPIs do indeed reflect quality of home care.
- To establish key aspects of quality and outcome and how these can be measured for individual providers.

Thirty-four councils participated in all, including one London borough, eight metropolitan authorities, 14 shire counties and 11 unitary authorities. Participating councils were asked to follow the guidance including sampling, data collection and management of the survey that was provided by the Department of Health (Department of Health, 2002). Information was collated from over 20,000 individual respondents, who were users of services from almost 700 different home care providers.

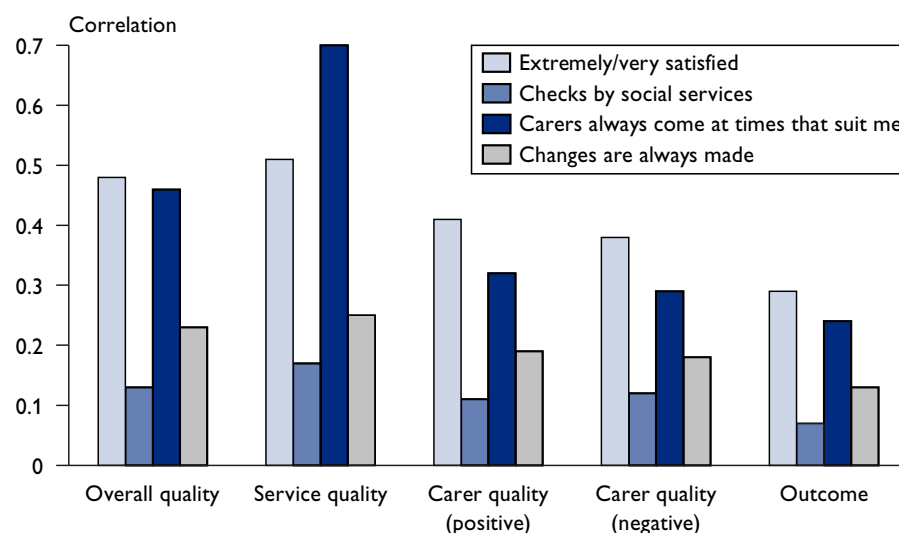
Current analyses illustrates that there are five reliable measures of quality based on the survey questions that have good internal consistency: overall quality, and four individual aspects of quality (service quality, positive and negative care worker characteristics and outcome). Figure 1 shows that the Best Value performance indicator of general satisfaction using the two top values and the indicator reflecting whether care workers arrive at times that suit the client were both highly associated with overall and service quality.

A primary objective in identifying the service user experiences was to improve our understanding of factors associated with variations in quality of home

## Further information

For further information on this programme of work, please contact any of the authors.

**Figure 1 Associations between quality measures and performance indicators**



care, and ultimately to learn from these to improve older people's experiences. Analyses indicated that type of authority, cost of home care and labour market factors were all significantly associated with perceptions of quality.

## Current work and next steps

While we have identified a number of important factors that influence variation within quality, there is very little known either about how different home care providers vary or how their practices affect quality. The principal aim of ongoing research is to build on the extension user experience survey and previous work (Forder et al., 2004) to investigate the relationship between workforce characteristics, area characteristics, costs and prices, commissioning arrangements and quality of care (Netten et al., 2004).

A telephone survey of providers and participating local authorities has been conducted and some additional data about services user views collected where this was not already available. We are also planning to repeat the UES extension study to evaluate how quality of home care services has changed over the past three years.

## Measuring outputs of personal social services

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) conducted a review led by Professor Sir Tony Atkinson on the future development of government output, productivity and associated price indices (Atkinson, 2005). Related to this, the PSSRU is developing an approach to measuring output that draws on previous theoretical and empirical work conducted by the Unit. The aim is to reflect the benefit people receive in a way that can flexibly indicate changes in patterns and quality of provision (Netten et al., 2005). Current work focuses on drawing on existing sources of data to apply the work in practice.

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