

# Using realist synthesis to review the literature in infection control:

## A welcome approach for the real world of nursing?

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### Background

- Infection control research should focus on how health workers' behaviours can be changed (Gould et al, 2007) and how evidence can be used within context
- In nursing, the term 'intermediary' defines a range of individuals who influence the transfer and utilisation of evidence in different healthcare settings (Milner et al, 2006)
- In this study, the term intermediary refers to functions of individuals who influence the uptake and use of evidence in infection control practice
- Realistic evaluation is a methodology used within health service research to evaluate complex interventions embedded in social systems (i.e. intermediary functions in delivery of infection control services)
- This study will identify Context-Mechanism-Outcomes (CMO) configurations -the function of intermediaries (Mechanisms) and their impact (Outcomes) in different contexts

### Aims of the review

- To identify a range of individuals that have an intermediary function in the infection control arena
- To investigate intermediary functions in infection control practices
- To understand the contexts which affect intermediary function in infection control policy and practice

### Realist synthesis (Pawson et al, 2004)

- The realist synthesis approach to reviewing the literature works under the principle that it is the unseen elements of a programme (the mechanisms) that influence its success or failure
- Whilst a realist synthesis replicates the stages of a systematic review, it also allows for the study of the interactions and relationships between what works, for whom, how and in what circumstances
- This approach acknowledges how different contexts can influence the success or failure of mechanisms (McCormack et al, 2007)

### Preliminary findings

- Conceptualising the 'intermediary' in infection control is complex
- The first stage of the realist synthesis process has been described as a 'conceptual quagmire' (Pawson et al, 2004)
- Preliminary findings show that this approach has much to offer the study of complex interventions in nursing
- Intermediary mechanisms in infection control are influenced by three key contextual factors –organisational, behavioural and environmental (Griffiths et al, 2010)
- The results of the synthesis will be tested through a case study in the next phase of the project

### References:

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