Youth-friendly primary-care services: do they make a difference?

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Background
The World Health Organization has called for the development of youth-friendly health services which attempt to remove the barriers young people face in accessing health services that are responsive to their needs.

Objectives
★ To review of the literature on the effectiveness of youth-friendly primary-care services.

Method
- Review of publications between 2000-2005 in Medline, PsycLit, Embase & the Cochrane Depression, Anxiety and Neurosis Controlled Trials Register Studies databases.
- Resulting abstracts also searched manually to identify any additional articles.
- Included all studies evaluating the effects of different service models of primary healthcare provision for young people.
- Articles in which youth-friendly services were described but not evaluated were excluded.

Results
Large number of services described in the literature.
Only 27 papers evaluating the effects of the service thus meeting inclusion criteria for the review.
Mostly observational, uncontrolled studies.
Most came from countries with established economies, but there were also studies from Africa, South America, China and Bangladesh.

The evidence:
➢ Youth-friendly primary care initiatives can lead to
  - improved access to services
  - improved provider performance
  - reduced youth sexual-risk behaviour
➢ Insufficient evidence on the effect of youth-friendly primary care initiatives on young people’s health itself.

Conclusions
• Many initiatives across the world.
• At present it is difficult to identify which of these initiatives are making a true difference to young people’s health.

Future youth-friendly primary care initiatives should:
• Involve young people in their design and their assessment.
• Address all the barriers.
• Work at the level of policy, providers, service staff, service environment, linked with the community.
• Be evaluated in controlled, and if possible randomised studies assessing the effect of services on health outcomes.

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