The purpose of this cluster-randomised controlled trial was to evaluate the efficacy of quality circles (QCs) working either with general data-based feedback or with an open benchmark within the field of asthma care and drug-drug interactions. Twelve QCs, involving 96 general practitioners from 85 practices, were randomised. Six QCs worked with traditional anonymous feedback and six with an open benchmark. Two QC meetings supported with feedback reports were held covering the topics "drug-drug interactions" and "asthma"; in both cases discussions were guided by a trained moderator. Outcome measures included health-related quality of life and patient satisfaction with treatment, asthma severity and number of potentially inappropriate drug combinations as well as the general practitioners' satisfaction in relation to the performance of the QC. A significant improvement in the treatment of asthma was observed in both trial arms. However, there was only a slight improvement regarding inappropriate drug combinations. There were no relevant differences between the group with open benchmark (B-QC) and traditional quality circles (T-QC). The physicians' satisfaction with the QC performance was significantly higher in the T-QCs. General practitioners seem to take a critical perspective about open benchmarking in quality circles.
Caution should be used when implementing benchmarking in a quality circle as it did not improve healthcare when compared to the traditional procedure with anonymised comparisons.