

# Cambridge Elements

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edited by

Mary Dixon-Woods,<sup>\*</sup> Katrina Brown,<sup>\*</sup> Sonja Marjanovic,<sup>†</sup>  
Tom Ling,<sup>†</sup> Ellen Perry,<sup>\*</sup> and Graham Martin<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>*THIS Institute (The Healthcare Improvement Studies Institute)*

<sup>†</sup>*RAND Europe*

## THE POSITIVE DEVIANCE APPROACH

Ruth Baxter<sup>1</sup> and Rebecca Lawton<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Yorkshire Quality and Safety Research Group,  
Bradford Institute for Health Research*

<sup>2</sup> *School of Psychology, University of Leeds*

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# The Positive Deviance Approach

Elements of Improving Quality and Safety in Healthcare

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Ruth Baxter<sup>1</sup> and Rebecca Lawton<sup>1,2</sup>  
<sup>1</sup> *Yorkshire Quality and Safety Research Group,  
Bradford Institute for Health Research*  
<sup>2</sup> *School of Psychology, University of Leeds*

**Author for correspondence:** Ruth Baxter, R.M.Baxter@leeds.ac.uk

**Abstract:** Positive deviance is an asset-based improvement approach. At its core is the belief that solutions to problems already exist within communities, and that identifying, understanding, and sharing these solutions enables improvements at scale. Originating in the field of international public health in the 1960s, positive deviance is now, with some adaptations, seeing growing application in healthcare. This Element presents examples of how positive deviance has been used to support healthcare improvement. The authors draw on an emerging view of safety, known as Safety II, to explain why positive deviance has drawn the interest of researchers and improvers alike. In doing so, they identify a set of fundamental values associated with the positive deviance approach and consider how far they align with current use. Throughout, the authors consider the untapped potential of the approach, reflect on its limitations, and offer insights into the possible challenges of using it in practice. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

**Keywords:** positive deviance, learning from high performers, Safety II, routinely collected data, qualitative methods

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