

Evidence Implementation in Health Care: Understanding How a Community of Practice Contributes to the Improvement of Evidence Uptake in Practice

Abstract:

The persistence of the “research – practice gap” has been a recurrent theme in the health care literature for over 20 years. The critical need to develop and implement strategies to translate evidence from research findings into evidence-based practice has become an imperative. Despite advances in research and innovations in technology and health care services and delivery, health professionals resist, delay or fail to consistently implement clinical practices based on available evidence as to their effectiveness, efficiency and safety.

There has been limited empirical research into the most effective and efficient ways of “bridging the gap”. Most research has been directed toward the development and implementation of evidence-based clinical guidelines. More complex problems require more complex solutions; knowledge does not inevitably change practice and improve health outcomes. There is a need to synthesise what is known about how and why the research practice gap persists.

In 2003 the National Institute of Clinical Studies established the Emergency Care Community of Practice, an innovative multidisciplinary initiative to promote and assist knowledge exchange, evidence uptake and practice change in participating emergency departments throughout Australia. A “Community of Practice” is a cohesive, interactive learning network of people who share common interests, experience and problems through regular interaction and collaboration. The Emergency Care Community of Practice was implemented without evidence of its appropriateness in health or its effectiveness as a model for evidence implementation, practice change, sustainability and transferability. This paper addresses the significant and pertinent challenges confronting the current PhD research study of the community of practice:

- synthesising various theoretical frameworks underpinning concepts of practice-relevant research, credible evidence and effective implementation;
- reconciling the mixed methods qualitative and quantitative approach given the debate about what constitutes credible evidence for guiding practice, and
- Identifying and measuring outcomes that may be attributed to the community of practice.