



National Institute of Clinical Studies

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Promoting the uptake of evidence in paediatric care

Evidence-practice gap

- The aim of this project was to increase understanding of how best to translate research findings into clinical practice. The project studied the implementation of paediatric guidelines in different departments of a large health service in Melbourne, Victoria, to investigate the factors that contribute to or detract from successful implementation in specific contexts, and to evaluate the process of change.

Key findings

- Existing guides to developing, implementing and evaluating guidelines provide only a broad-brush approach, with little practical information on how to go about these activities.
- This project has filled that gap. It developed, tested and refined a suite of very practical methods and resources – a hands-on guide – to developing, implementing and evaluating guidelines in the real world, to enable others to develop and implement guidelines in their health services and avoid the pitfalls.
- The project took a proven, evidence-based research methodology for the trial of complex interventions, and adapted it to evaluate the implementation of existing guidelines. It was a successful approach, and provided considerable insight into the process of implementation.
- A theoretical framework provided a reference point for the project. It proved valuable to identify the factors to be investigated, map the evaluation activities and assess their coverage, detect gaps to be addressed, ensure that conclusions were valid, and identify opportunities for additional investigation.
- The project gained many insights into how context influences the process of implementation, and how to address the barriers to implementation in different contexts. This was achieved by comparing implementation of different guidelines in different contexts (an emergency department and a newborn services department), but within the same organisation and by the same team.

Implications for clinical practice

- The findings of the project will be useful to people working on projects to develop, implement and evaluate clinical guidelines in health services. The recommendations and resources developed will be available in the detailed toolkit currently being completed by Dr Harris and her team.
- Where another guide might simply say, for example, “involve consumers” or “set up a multidisciplinary group”, this project discovered and documented how to find the relevant consumers, capture their views and integrate those views in decision making. Similarly, it found how to bring together a multidisciplinary group of busy health professionals, gain management commitment to making this happen, and structure meeting processes to gain most value from the time and skills available.
- Resources include terms of reference, letters, invitations, flyers, newsletters, posters, methods to capture and provide feedback, and quick guides to running meetings, together with hints, tips and case studies.
- One of the key steps in implementation is to identify barriers and enablers, and the project found that simple structured surveys and focus groups provided practical and straightforward ways to do this.
- A very simple and effective approach to gain information was to ask ‘What works, what doesn’t, why, how can we improve it?’ These questions yielded rich and detailed information when used with researchers, clinicians and consumers, in surveys, interviews, workshops and focus groups.
- Implementing guidelines is difficult, and support structures for the implementation team need to be built in from the start. Regular team meetings and team retreats proved an excellent way to do this, to turn negatives into positives and learn from difficulties encountered, as well as capturing and documenting the project ‘learnings’.