

Health services research in primary care:

Influencing health policy, service development and professional practice

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Making a difference to health and health care: Evidence based policy and practice

- Our goal should be evidence based:
 - Health policy
 - Service organisation and delivery
 - Clinical practice
- Evidence should be derived from objective, value free scientific research. The randomised controlled trial represents a 'gold standard' for evidence based health care.
- The job of researchers is to produce scientific evidence.
- It is the responsibility of policy makers, managers and health professionals to base their decisions on the scientific evidence

Issues for health services research in primary care

- Scope and purpose of health services research in primary care
- Stakeholders in health services research
- Shaping the agenda for HSR in primary care
- Disciplinary perspectives
- Research questions, designs and methods
- Doing HSR in the real world
- Disseminating research findings
- Contributing to knowledge and understanding

Scope and purposes of HSR in primary care

- The funding, content, organisation and delivery of health care, from the individual patient/professional interaction to the organisation of health care systems
- Research into service organisation and delivery deals with complex social and political processes in the real world
- Purpose is to enhance knowledge and understanding to support:
 - Policy formulation and implementation
 - Management of health care
 - Professional practice
- Research is only one source of evidence. Decisions will be underpinned by knowledge and understanding derived from a variety of sources.

Stakeholders in HSR in primary care

- Users of health care
- Policy makers: politicians, civil servants, managers and health professions
- Commissioners/funders of services
- Service providers: organisations, managers, health professions
- Researchers
- Research funders
- Research subjects

Shaping the agenda for HSR in primary care

- What gets onto the research agenda and why?
- The role of research funders
- The role of the research community
- Mechanisms for involving other stakeholders in shaping the research agenda
- Investigator driven research versus the customer-contractor model
- Values, politics and power in shaping the research agenda

Research questions

- Involving stakeholders in formulating research questions
- Locating research questions in theory and current knowledge – disciplinary perspectives
- Formulating questions to ensure that they address enduring issues as well as short term requirements
- Interaction between research design/methods and research questions

Research designs and methods

- Matching the design and methods to the research questions?
- Selecting appropriate designs and methods. HSR commonly requires mixed methods.
- Experimental designs rarely feasible when evaluating complex interventions in the real world.
- Resource constraints and feasibility of the research
- Defining and measuring inputs, processes and outcomes

Improving services for orthopaedic patients: Stakeholders, questions, disciplinary perspectives, designs and methods (Fulop et al 2001)

- **Stakeholders:** Patients, clinicians, managers, policy makers
- **Questions:**
 - What is the best way of delivering orthopaedic care?
 - How can change in existing services be implemented?
 - How can care be further improved through organisational change?
- **Disciplinary perspectives:** medicine, nursing, epidemiology, economics, sociology, history, social policy, psychology
- **Designs and methods:** randomised trial, economic evaluation, case study, participant observation, interview, secondary analysis, operational research, action research, policy analysis, etc.

What is the best way of delivering orthopaedic care?

- Will telemedicine be as clinically effective in terms of accuracy of diagnosis? (epidemiological research/RCT)
- Will telemedicine be as efficient for the health service? (economic evaluation)
- What impact will telemedicine have on the relationship between the GP and specialist? (historical research)
- What impact will telemedicine have on the patient's relationship with the GP and specialist? (micro-sociology)

How can change to existing services be implemented?

- What effect would the method of funding orthopaedic services have on implementing telemedicine? (organisational economics)
- What impact will telemedicine have on the functioning of the orthopaedic service? (operational research)
- What impact will telemedicine have on the behaviour, attitude and emotions of clinical staff? (organisational psychology)
- What happens in practice when telemedicine is implemented? (action research)

How can care be improved further by changes at the level of the organisation?

- What incentives exist to encourage integration and what is the cost of greater integration? (organisational economics)
- What factors facilitate or hinder integration of services (organisational studies)
- Which policies might facilitate greater integration? (policy analysis)

Doing HSR in the real world

- Mismatch between the timetables of stakeholders and the research
- Adapting to changes in policy, service organisation, delivery, staffing, etc.
- Working with research subjects
- Flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness

Disseminating research findings

- Commitment to dissemination by all parties
- Intellectual property, copyright and freedom to publish
- Planning and managing the dissemination process
- Working with customers and other stakeholders
- Multiple methods of dissemination
- Exploiting opportunities and handling the media
- Spin and censorship
- Funding dissemination

Knowledge based health policy, service organisation and delivery

- Decisions should be based on values, knowledge and understanding, supported by evidence
- Health services research is but one (important) source of evidence, knowledge and understanding
- Good HSR draws on many disciplines and commonly requires a variety of methods. The RCT has an important, but limited, contribution to make.
- Effective HSR requires dialogue with stakeholders, flexibility and responsiveness
- A more mature relationship between research, policy and practice will enhance our capacity to make a difference.

Suggested reading

- Fulop, N. Allen, P. Clarke, A. and Black, N. (2001) *Studying the organisation and delivery of health services*. London: Routledge (ISBN 0-415-2563-8)
- Mays, N, Wyke, S, Malbon, G. and Goodwin, N. (2001) *The purchasing of health care by primary care organisations*. Buckingham: Open University Press. (ISBN 0-335-20900-9)
- Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*. London: Sage