
Lunch seminar

Thursday 3 June 2004

What's [not] working with Divisions and research?

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There is an increasing requirement for Divisions of General Practice to be involved in research. This has also been identified as a priority in the recent Divisions review. However, informal consultation with both Divisions and researchers suggests that whilst there are some local success stories, the current 'top-down' approach is not effective. In particular there appears to be uncertainty about the respective roles of the Divisions and the researchers and the nature of the research undertaken. The aim of this session is to workshop these issues with a view to identifying barriers to expanding research capacity and practice in Divisions and finding ways to address these to the mutual benefit of both researchers and Divisions. An outline of some of the issues to be covered is provided below.

- There is often misunderstanding and a lack of clarity between Divisions and researchers about what 'research' constitutes. There can be a sense from some researchers that anything less than a gold standard is not worth bothering with. Yet for many Divisions the research value is to be found at the development and evaluation end of the research spectrum. Divisions need to understand the importance of solid evaluation so that the proper processes can be implemented at the outset, not at the end when useful baseline data is often unobtainable. How can Divisions and researchers work together to foster this understanding to their mutual benefit?
- Further, there is uncertainty about the nature of the research relationship between Divisions and researchers/ academics — are the academics there to do all the research (with the frequent result that Divisions end up feeling 'used and abused' in the process, unless there

is extensive collaboration at all stages) — or are the researchers there to pass on research knowledge and skills? If so, who are they passing those skills on to — GPs, Divisional staff or both? What is the meaning of 'collaboration'?

- Also what is the role of the researchers in such situations? Some informal reports suggest that there is a real willingness on the part of researchers to assist Divisions in gaining research skills and understanding but attempts to bring these into Divisions have been obstructed. There is thus a need to look at the barriers to research implementation in Divisions and to look at ways these can be addressed.
- National Programs: Many Divisions frequently state that they get little from the Primary Health Care Research Evaluation and Development (PHC RED) program. What does not work about it (for Divisions) and how can it be made to work? How can the recently formed Australian Institute for Primary Health Care (AIPHC) assist in building research capacity within Divisions? Is this part of its role?
- How can Divisions have more input into the research agenda and what are the main (structural and cultural) barriers to building research capacity within Divisions? How can these be addressed to move forward?

The Conference presents a valuable opportunity to workshop these ideas with interested parties to find workable solutions and ways forward to the mutual benefit of Divisions, researchers and ultimately, health consumers.