

EFFECTIVE LINKS between Divisions of general practice and universities

Results so far...

A collaborative research project between PHCRIS and ADGP

Research Team

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Outline of presentation

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Why do the project

- A goal of both the Commonwealth Government and ADGP (Australian Government 2004; Yates 2004).
- Supports relevant, rigorous and reliable research and evaluation activity and outcomes
- Important to building research capacity in general practice; Divisions are key players
- Links exist between Divisions and universities...but appears scope for improvement (Kalucy et al 2004; Yates & Pearce 2004)




Definitions

Effective


Activity that brings about a result, i.e. fulfils mutually desired aims or goals in ways that are considered useful and meaningful

Links

Both informal and formal activity associated with connections, interactions or relations between Divisions and universities. This includes partnership and collaboration activity.



About the project





Aim

To increase understanding of links between Divisions of general practice and universities, to support the effectiveness of linkage between these sectors

Objectives

- Document participants' perceptions of R&E activity
- Document the current state of links including: areas of interest, focus, and expectations
- Identify factors associated with effective links including: relative value, benefits and criteria for effectiveness
- Identify factors associated with lack of links including: issues and challenges
- Identify policy and practice implications

Approach

- Qualitative
- Exploratory & descriptive
- Collaborative

Ethics

- Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee

Data collection


- Semi-structured in-depth telephone interviewing

Sample


- Purposive sample – Key informants; including Divisions with and without known links to universities
- Public Call for Expression of Interest (EOI) to participate

Participants

- N=21**
- Division n=12 (EOI n=3)
- University n=9





Results so far...



Participants' characteristics

Participants characteristics	Division	University
	Participants (n=12)	Participants (n=9)
Urban location	42% (n=5)	78% (n=7)
Rural location	58% (n=7)	22% (n=2)
In current role between 0-5 years	75% (n=9)	67% (n=6)
	(range: 6 mths - 11 years)	(range: 1 mth - 6 years)
Masters or PhD qualifications	83% (n=10)	89% (n=8)
Known links with PHCRED programs	25% (n=3)	56% (n=5)



How much importance do Divisions place on research?

Division Participants placed high importance on R&E activities

It's very important. Part of our whole approach...research and evaluation are embedded in all activities so we can provide good services (Div8r).

A lot of importance...without research the organisation would not have the necessary data to prioritise funds, access and respond to community needs that arise, evaluate what works elsewhere and in the region or respond authentically to community identified issues (Divop2).

It is the basis of tools for our performance evaluation...to see if we're heading in the right way (Div3r).

Views about research and evaluation activity

Similarities

- Participants shared similar views about R&E activity.

To increase our understanding of what we are doing, including what works, didn't work. It feeds into a cycle of improvement (Div12r).

Research is to find out what goes on, to be objective about what is happening, and how things work. Evaluation is to see if things are going as well as you think (Uni9u).



Differences

- The interest of Division participants was on applied rather than theoretical research (e.g. activity contributing to quality improvement, determining progress, effecting change)

I use research and evaluation as a tool for reflective practice (Div9u).

To gain more information to effect change and to benchmark progress (Div8r).



To improve program impact and sustain behaviour change (Div3r).

Views about whether research and evaluation activity is for specialists, or anyone

Similarities

- Participants agreed:
 - R&E can be for anyone with the necessary skills
 - There is an increasing role for specialist expertise (e.g. research design, statistical analysis) as R&E increased in complexity, to ensure rigorous and valid approaches.
 - Links between Divisions and universities are valuable to achieve specialist involvement.
 - It was important for specialists researchers and others to work together [collaboratively] once a link was established.






Views about whether research and evaluation activity is for specialists, or anyone

[They are for] Anyone with the skills...[but] you have to work with people with good research skills, if there are contacts and the right training then anyone can do research and evaluation (Div12r).

Anyone who's curious can do research, but they need to learn how to do it...so what they do isn't wasted. [They] should talk to people who've done research so research is rigorous and objective (Uni9u).

Sometimes specialists need to have local knowledge to engage with local people (i.e. insiders connect with local communities better than someone from outside). It's therefore better when practitioners and specialists work together if specialist levels of expertise are needed (Div8r).

The state of current links

Similarities

- Almost all participants (n=20) had linked around research or evaluation activity.
- These links ranged from new and developing relationships, to more established relationships.

[We're]... only really starting now...what's bringing about change is possible the changing role of Divisions...[we're moving from pure service provision to a focus on becoming 'agents of change' (Divop1).

The department has a history of linking with Divisions, whether as partners or just talking to each other (Uni3u).



Challenges associated with links

Similarities

- Divisions and universities both experienced challenges establishing and maintaining links.

Never had a change of getting involved. [There are] No systems, no protocols etc., for university involvement. I'm hoping the recommendations from this study may address how Divisions can be more involved with universities. I don't know who to contact. The Vice Chancellor? (Div3r).

Our experience of establishing links] has been variable... It's clearly dependent on who the CEO is of a Division, and how facilitative they are of the relationship (Uni4u).



Challenges associated with links

There was an expectation by the Divisions that the Department PHCRED program could provide all its research and evaluation needs, which we couldn't fulfil because it was beyond the program's charter and capacity. This led to strained relationships, though this is getting better now over time (Uni5u).

In our experience...the university had to go 'cap in hand' [to Divisions]. This is not a partnership in my view (Uni9u).



Motivation for links

- Divisions:**

Enriched Divisional activities, supported communication and provided reciprocal benefits.

We find working in partnerships [with universities] assists our Divisional focus (Divop1).

They [universities] have students on placement with us. We network with them [universities] on collegial kinds of things (Div7r).





Motivation for links

- Universities in general:**

Supported education and training, R&E relevance and appropriateness, communication and partnerships in research.

Partly in relation to training of health workers and GPs. Have also undertaken basic research with local Division (Uni1r).

Working in partnership is critical to our organisation. Its imperative for us to be linked into our community. It gives us better research, i.e. feel more confident you are asking the right questions and identifying what are the priority issues that are going to have the most benefit at the end of the day (Uni10r).



Motivation for links

- **Universities with PHCRED programs:**

Supported education and training, which helped communication, relationship building and further interactions.

We get to know each other through this program (PHCRED) this has led to us getting together to problem solve other things (Uni1r).

We've certainly worked closely with a number of Divisions. We've worked with them, not just on research activities, but a whole range of activities. Under PHCRED we have a MOU with a number of local Divisions, which cements the historical informal linkages...and sets out strategies for how we'll work together (Uni7u).



What activity are links related to?

Similarities

- Links between Divisions and universities in general (i.e. not university PHCRED programs) were around research rather than evaluation activity.

Influencing factors:

- Research activity advantaged Divisions
- Divisions lacked expertise, resources and research background to attract funds in own right
- Divisions experienced barriers when approached universities without PHCRED programs about evaluation
- The focus of academia



What activity are links related to?

Undertaking research partnerships provides economies of scale (Divop1).

We don't feel we have expertise in these areas...It's not always part of our usual activities (Div8r).

When we've looked for evaluation support universities don't seem to have time...I imagine research work fits more closely with university interests (Div6u).

Because we are an academic site we would be looking for research collaborations (Uni4u).

What activity are links related to?

Differences



- Links between Divisions and university PHCRED programs were around evaluation rather than research activity.

Influencing factors:

- o Capacity building in evaluation met Divisions' needs and interests



Evaluation activity...I think this is Divisions' more immediate need (Uni5u).



Divisions seem more interested in evaluation than research...[they] seem happier for staff to be involved in evaluation skill development, [possibly] because this is part of their business plans and program activities (Uni2u).






Factors influencing effectiveness of links

Structural	Process	Outcome
Access to opportunities	Autonomy	Advantages to members, community, practice
Appropriateness of activity	Commitment to cooperation	Benefit over time, including increased access to resources
Clarity about how to contribute to each others roles	Confidence to engage	Extent met professional requirements
Continuity of personnel	Definition of roles	Goals/outcomes achieved
Cost effectiveness	Fairness (equity)	Opportunities for growth
Establishment of protocols and processes	Flexibility	Purposefulness
Expectations and interests	Mutual benefit	Quality outcomes or products
Political will	Mutual respect	
Relevance to interests/needs	Mutual understanding	
Resource availability	Open communication	
Responsibility of partners	Productivity of activity	
Similarity of values	Reciprocity (give and take)	
Strategic value of activity	Responsibility of partners	
Understanding of relative capacity and constraints	Responsiveness of partners	
	Trust	

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- ### Summary
- Divisions and universities are **currently experiencing**:
 - a range of new and established links around R&E activity
 - challenges associated with establishing and maintaining links
 - More links around research than evaluation activity, except where links are with PHCRED programs.
 - Divisions and universities have **similar**:
 - views about the purpose of R&E activity
 - needs to link because joint activity provides benefit and supports R&E quality and relevance

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- ### Summary
- Divisions and universities **agree** that:
 - R&E activity can be for anyone with the necessary skills
 - there is an increasing role for links with R&E specialists as the complexity of activity increases to ensure rigor and validity
 - links are valuable for involving R&E specialists
 - It is important for everyone to work together (i.e. collaboratively)
 - Divisions and universities **differ** in:
 - The type of research they are interested in (i.e. applied versus theoretical)
 - Their need to work with R&E specialists
 - Their motivation for establishing links

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- ### Conclusions so far...
- Current R&E links go beyond university based PHCRED programs
 - There are challenges associated with establishing and maintaining R&E links
 - Divisions place high importance on their role in undertaking applied research; and emphasise collaborative action when linking



Conclusions so far...

- There are more commonalities than differences in Divisions and universities' views and needs around R&E links
- Differences are related to:
 - the type of research each may be interested in
 - motivation for linking
- Although differences occur, Divisions and universities are engaging in links



Conclusions so far...

- For Divisions effective links around applied research help them to undertake rigorous high quality activity, build research capacity and meet Divisional objectives
- For Divisions effective links with PHCRED programs meets their evaluation capacity building needs
- For universities effective links support education and training, greater relevance of research, partnerships in research and ongoing communication
- Effectiveness of links is related to structural, process and outcome factors

Next steps...