

5 Building effective linkages in RCBI

Effective Links between Universities and Divisions of General Practice

On the first day of the meeting, Ms Barbara Beacham, the Project Facilitator of the Effective Links study, a collaborative research project between PHC RIS and the Australian Divisions of General Practice, presented some of the early study results. The presentation was followed on Day Two of the meeting by two concurrent workshop sessions designed to discuss the policy and practice implications of these results.

The Effective Links study is a qualitative research project, which aims to increase understanding of links between Divisions of general practice and universities, to support the effectiveness of linkage between these sectors. During October 2004, 21 participants (12 from Divisions and 9 from universities) took part in telephone interviews.

Summary – the preliminary results presented at the meeting showed that:

- o when linking around research and evaluation activity Divisions are likely to place high importance on undertaking activity contributing to quality improvement, determining progress, effecting change (applied research/evaluation) and on collaborative involvement when linking.
- o Divisions and universities are likely to have experienced:
 - a range of new and established links around research and evaluation activity;
 - challenges associated with establishing and maintaining links; and
 - more links around research than evaluation activity, except where links are with PHCRED programs.
- o Divisions and universities are likely to have similar:
 - views about the purpose of research and evaluation activity; and
 - needs to link, because joint activity provides benefit and supports research and evaluation quality and relevance.
- o Divisions and universities are likely to agree that:
 - research and evaluation activity can be for anyone with the necessary skills;
 - there is an increasing role for links with research and evaluation specialists as the complexity of activity increases, to ensure rigor and validity;
 - links are valuable for involving research and evaluation specialists; and
 - it is important for everyone to work together (i.e. collaboratively) when linking.
- o Divisions and universities are likely to differ in:
 - the type of research they are interested in (e.g. Divisions – applied; universities – theoretical);
 - their need to work with research and evaluation specialists; and
 - their motivation for establishing links.

Across the 2004 national meeting there was a high level of support for the need for links between University Departments and Divisions of General Practice. During the workshop discussions conducted on Day Two, participants' from Divisions (n=5), Universities (n=5) and DoHA (n=4) emphasised the centrality of relationships (both

individual and organisational) to effective links between Divisions and Universities. Among the issues discussed was the suggestion that to ensure effective links, resources – both time and funding – need to be given to support developing and maintaining relationships and links between Divisions and Universities. A further suggestion was that knowledge and practical competency in collaboration and partnership processes was necessary to achieving equitable relationships and ultimately supports ongoing linkage. In this regard participants suggested a potential role for RCBIs in contributing to developing awareness and competencies in collaborative interactions between Universities and in Divisions.

Other issues discussed were that collaborations could be enhanced when co-location was possible (eg. of a researcher in a Division or of a Division member in a University setting), so that the researchers can be visible and build relationships. It may also be important for there to be explicit memorandums of understanding drawn up to underpin and support the functioning of relationships. To ensure that scarce resources are most effectively utilised, it may be desirable for linkages to be broader, involving a number of Divisions, thus spreading the load and creating a bigger research pool.

Indigenous research

Mr Ian Gentle's presentation on the first day of the meeting was followed by discussion about Indigenous research across the meeting. A workshop *Indigenous ways of knowing and doing research* at which Indigenous research was discussed including mechanisms by which Indigenous and Western methodologies can be brought closer together was also held.

The workshop concluded that there is great potential for the development of effective primary health care research in Indigenous communities through the PHC RED Strategy, conducted with Indigenous researchers to address community priorities. The next years should see much greater attention to this important area across the whole of RCBI. Indeed the group felt that, given the health inequality of Indigenous people, RCBI had a duty of care to take up Indigenous research in primary health care in the years ahead.

Research is unlikely to be on a single, carefully defined health issue, but done within the context of the social and political realities of Indigenous communities and integrated into more broad based community initiatives. Partnerships with experienced researchers are important for the transfer of skills and knowledge, but partners must be capable of 'decolonising' the process of research and of working effectively within and with Indigenous communities.

<p>The meeting agreed that a working group should be established to raise the profile of Indigenous research in the PHC RED Strategy and consider mechanisms by which Indigenous research within the Strategy can be further developed according to Indigenous principles and practices.</p>
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It was agreed that the working group should have broad representation and be facilitated by non-researcher Indigenous representatives. The working group should collaborate with other research initiatives in the area of Indigenous health and wellbeing.

Consumer participation

A workshop group was formed to discuss ways that consumer participation in the PHC RED Strategy could be enabled. The group considered the NHMRC and Consumer's Health Forum joint *Statement on Consumer and Community Participation in Health and Medical Research* in its discussions.

Among the issues discussed was the need for greater support for consumers, including carers, to be involved in primary health care research. Support might be in the form of training, payment of people for contributing their time, and reimbursement of expenses. It would be important to recognise the significance of and involve health consumer organisations in the PHC RED Strategy. Consumer organisations can enhance research activities by providing expertise and an understanding of consumer needs and experiences. They can also provide support and training to consumers involved in the PHC RED Strategy.

The meeting agreed that a working group on consumer participation in the PHC RED Strategy be formed in the next period to continue to explore mechanisms by which consumers can be appropriately involved in all facets of the program, particularly RCBI.