

Clarifying a Policy or Managerial Problem Using Patient-Oriented Research

Masterclass on the Conduct and Use of Patient-Oriented Research
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Objectives for this Session

- To appreciate
 - Questions to ask about a problem
 - Types of research evidence needed to answer these questions (and related research terminology)
 - Appropriate sources of key types of pre-appraised research evidence
- To understand the importance of
 - Working iteratively to understand a problem in light of institutional constraints, interest group pressure, values and many other types of information, as well as 'external' factors such as the state of the economy
 - Being systematic and transparent in finding and using research evidence as one input to the decision-making process
 - Looking first for a perfect match in the available research evidence (to support an instrumental use) and then looking more broadly (to support a conceptual use)
- To develop skills in
 - Clarifying a problem
 - Searching appropriate sources of pre-appraised research evidence



Key Resources for this Session

- Finding and Using Research Evidence summary sheet – first box only
- HSE taxonomy
- Health Systems Evidence overview (supplementary)
- McMaster Optimal Aging Portal (supplementary)
- SUPPORT tools list (supplementary)



Questions to Consider

1. What is the problem (and its causes)?
2. How did the problem come to attention and has this process influenced the prospect of it being addressed?
3. What indicators can be used, or collected, to establish the magnitude of the problem and to measure progress in addressing it?
4. What comparisons can be made to establish the magnitude of the problem and to measure progress in addressing it?
5. How can a problem be framed (or described) in a way that will motivate different groups?



Q1: What is the Problem (and its Causes)?

- Describe the problem in terms of whether it relates to one or more of
 - A risk factor, disease or condition
 - A program, service or drug currently being used
 - Current health system arrangements within which programs, services and drugs are provided
 - Governance arrangements
 - Financial arrangements
 - Delivery arrangements
 - Current degree of implementation of an agreed course of action (e.g., a policy)
 - Patients / citizens (e.g., lack of awareness of a free program)
 - Health workers (e.g., lack of adherence to guidelines)
 - Organizations (e.g., lack of performance management of staff)
 - System (e.g., lack of enforcement of regulations)



Q1: What is the Problem (and its Causes)? (2)

- This is a ‘brainstorming’ step about the problem and its potential causes, and later questions will require searching for data and research evidence to more accurately clarify the problem (i.e., this is the first step in an iterative process of clarifying the problem)
- If you are unfamiliar with how to assess existing health system arrangements as either a problem or the potential cause of a problem, consider spending time learning the taxonomy of health system arrangements used by Health Systems Evidence



Q1: What is the Problem (and its Causes)? Example 1

- **Low rates of childhood immunization**
 - A risk factor, disease or condition – **Re-emergence of some preventable childhood diseases, such as measles**
 - A program, service or drug currently being used – **Program coverage rates dropped 5% in the past year and the program has not corrected a celebrity's assertions about safety and effectiveness**
 - Current health system arrangements within which programs, services and drugs are provided
 - Governance arrangements – **Fragmented accountability**
 - Financial arrangements – **New immigrants have to pay out-of-pocket for immunizations for their children**
 - Delivery arrangements – **Many children are not registered with a primary care team that can proactively reach them**
 - Current degree of implementation of an agreed course of action (e.g., a policy) – **Some parents are not aware of new schedule**



Q1: What is the Problem (and its Causes)? Example 2

- **Many citizens do not have a primary care physician**
 - A risk factor, disease or condition – **Rising rates of chronic diseases**
 - A program, service or drug currently being used – **Many citizens do not benefit from coordinated prevention and proactive management of chronic diseases**
 - Current health system arrangements within which programs, services and drugs are provided
 - Governance arrangements – **No professional-level accountability for ensuring patients are ‘attached’ to a primary care practice**
 - Financial arrangements – **Most physicians are paid on a fee-for-service basis and can thrive even in well-served communities**
 - Delivery arrangements – **Many physicians work in solo practices**
 - Current degree of implementation of an agreed course of action (e.g., a policy) – **Policymakers do not enforce return-of-service agreements signed by physicians**



Q1: What is the Problem (and its Causes)? Your Example

- **Provide your example of a problem (and its causes) using the task sheet (#2), which uses the following prompts**
 - A risk factor, disease or condition
 - A program, service or drug currently being used
 - Current health system arrangements within which programs, services and drugs are provided
 - Governance arrangements
 - Financial arrangements
 - Delivery arrangements
 - Current degree of implementation of an agreed upon course of action (e.g., a policy)



Research Evidence can Help to Respond to Two Key Questions

- What comparisons can be made to establish the magnitude of the problem and to measure progress in addressing it? (question 4)
 - Research findings from administrative database studies or community surveys that make comparisons across countries (or provinces / states, districts) or organizations
- How can a problem be framed (or described) in a way that will motivate different groups? (question 5)
 - Research findings from qualitative studies that address the meanings that individuals or groups attach to the problem, indicators and comparisons



Appropriate Sources of Research Evidence to Respond to the Questions

- What comparisons can be made to establish the magnitude of the problem and to measure progress in addressing it? (question 4)
 - Research findings from administrative database studies or community surveys that make comparisons across countries (or provinces / states, districts) or organizations
 - Two of PubMed's 'hedges' (i.e., validated search strategies) can help to identify single studies
 - Process assessment
 - Outcomes assessment
 - One of Health System Evidence's document types can help to identify systematic reviews if your problem (or its causes) involve health system arrangements
 - Systematic reviews addressing other questions (although some of these reviews will address options, not the problem)



Appropriate Sources of Research Evidence to Respond to the Questions (2)

- How can a problem be framed (or described) in a way that will motivate different groups? (question 5)
 - Research findings from qualitative studies that address the meanings that individuals or groups attach to the problem, indicators and comparisons
 - Another of PubMed's 'hedges' (i.e., validated search strategies) can help here
 - Qualitative research
 - Again, the same Health System Evidence document type can help to identify systematic reviews if your problem (or its causes) involve health system arrangements
 - Systematic reviews addressing other questions



Appropriate Sources of Research Evidence to Respond to the Questions (3)

- Considerations to keep in mind for conducting searches:
 - Being systematic means undertaking the searches of these databases with close attention to detail
 - Being transparent means documenting all searches and the results so there is a clear record trail of what was done, what was found and when the work was done



How to Search Appropriate Sources of Research Evidence - PubMed

- Steps on the internet for single studies
 1. Go to www.pubmed.org and then click on “Topic-specific queries”
 2. Click on ‘Health services research (HSR) queries’
 3. Copy and paste the search into the open search field
 4. Select the appropriate ‘hedge’
 - Administrative database studies or community surveys
 - Process assessment
 - Outcomes assessment
 - Qualitative research
 5. Select ‘narrow specific search’
 6. Select ‘Go’
 7. Read the first one, two or three screens of results, looking carefully for the right type of study for the question you posed
 8. Document your search then repeat using different search terms in step 3



How to Search Appropriate Sources of Research Evidence (2) - HSE

- Steps on the internet for systematic reviews addressing health system arrangements or implementation strategies
 1. Go to 'Health Systems Evidence' (www.healthsystemsevidence.org) and log in (create an account if you don't already have one)
 2. Click on 'Advanced search'
 3. Copy and paste the search terms into the search field (or select an appropriate health system arrangement in the taxonomy)
 4. Select 'Systematic reviews addressing other questions' from the 'Document feature: Type' filters
 5. Read the results, looking carefully for the right type of study for the question you posed
 6. Document your search then repeat using different search terms



How to Search Appropriate Sources of Research Evidence (3)

Describe what you did (each source and how you searched it), what you found, and when you did the work, using the task sheet (#3), which provides the following prompts related to conducting searches for administrative database studies or community surveys and for qualitative studies

1. What you did

- a. Source (and purpose) – *e.g., PubMed for administrative database studies and community surveys (or Health Systems Evidence for reviews of such studies) that make comparisons to establish the magnitude of the problem you are considering and to measure progress in addressing it (question 4)*
- b. Search details – *e.g., boxes ticked, search terms entered and number of ‘screens’ read*

2. What you found – *e.g., three relevant studies, each with full citation*

3. When you did it – *e.g., today’s date*



Summing Up

- Problem clarification involves
 - Brainstorming about a problem and its potential causes (question 1)
 - Q1 - What Is the problem (and its causes)?
 - Search for relevant data (questions 2 and 3) and research evidence (questions 4 and 5) in appropriate sources (PubMed for single studies or Health Systems Evidence for systematic reviews related to health system arrangements)
 - Q2 - How did the problem come to attention and has this process influenced the prospect of it being addressed?
 - Q3 - What indicators can be used, or collected, to establish the magnitude of the problem and to measure progress in addressing it?
 - Q4 - What comparisons can be made to establish the magnitude of the problem and to measure progress in addressing it?
 - Q5 - How can a problem be framed (or described) in a way that will motivate different groups?
 - Iteratively clarifying the problem (and its causes) in light of the data and research evidence found

