Translating Population Health Research into Policy and Practice

The Role of Academic Incentives

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Every system is perfectly designed to achieve the results it gets.
Population Health Research

- Peer reviewed publications
- Research grants
- Conference presentations
- Teaching
If you think changing history is hard, try changing a history department!
New Paradigm Emerging?

- Interdisciplinary
- Problem identification includes non-academic partners
- Including a focus on knowledge transfer

Phaneuf, 2007
The Role of Academic Incentives in Applied Health Services Research and Knowledge Transfer

Patricia Pittman, Ph.D., AcademyHealth; Margaret Trinity, M.M., Independent Consultant; Jennifer Tsai, M.P.H., AcademyHealth

October 2010
Pressures on the Academy

- Recognition of the need to focus on population health
- Demands on AMCs to serve the public good
- Federal initiatives (e.g. CTSAs)
- ACA related pressures
Growing Interest in Research Impact Assessment

Given limited funding available for research, science agencies and funders around the world are emphasizing research that has clear societal benefits and documented impact outside academia

How do you evaluate research impact?

Traditional tools to evaluate impact:

- Bibliometrics
- Case studies
- Economic cost-benefit analysis
- Peer review

The Payback Framework

- Commonly used, multi-dimensional model for “paybacks” from research, including:
  - 1) Knowledge; 2) Benefits to future research and research use; 3) Benefits from informing policy and policy development; 4) Health and health sector benefits; and 5) Broader economic benefits

Funders are taking note…

The Research Excellence Framework (REF): new peer assessment system for evaluating the quality of research in UK higher education institutions that informs selective allocation of research funding\(^1\)

National Science Foundation Merit Review Criteria\(^2\)
- Intellectual Merit (e.g. importance, innovation, etc.)
- Broader impacts (e.g. societal impacts)

Among others

\(^1\)Research Excellence Framework (2014): [http://www.ref.ac.uk/](http://www.ref.ac.uk/)
UK Research Excellence Framework

→ Impact is defined as ‘any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’

→ Outcomes used in 3 ways:
  – Funding allocation
  – Accountability for public investment
  – Benchmarking & establishing reputational yardsticks

→ Allocation formulat
  – The quality of research **outputs**. (65% of assessment)
  – The **impact** of research beyond academia. (20% of assessment)
  – The research **environment**. (15% of assessment)
UK REF Analysis Impact Case Studies

Field of Research (FOR)

- Public health and health services
- Historical studies
- Cultural studies
- Policy and administration
- Literary studies
- Clinical sciences
- Applied economics
- Psychology
- Artificial intelligence and image processing
- Sociology
- Specialist studies in education
- Neurosciences
- Law
- Information systems
- Political science
- Film, television and digital media
- Statistics
- Business and management

Number of case studies coded to a Field of Research (FOR), allowing for up to three codes per case study
Figure 1. BIC program logic model 1

Activities

Outputs

Outcomes

BIAs

BIC OUTCOME 1: Integrate research and education by advancing discovery and understanding while at the same time promoting teaching, training, and learning

BIC OUTCOME 2: Broaden the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, geographic, etc.)

BIC OUTCOME 3: Enhance the infrastructure for research and/or education, such as facilities, instrumentation, networks, and partnerships

BIC OUTCOME 4: Enhance scientific and technological understanding through the broad dissemination of results

BIC OUTCOME 5: Benefit society at large

The measures of successful completion of the activity
So what’s the hold up?

- The UK, Australia, and Canada have made significant strides in evaluating research impact and aligning funding allocation
- But… the US lags: Why?
Challenges

→ No metric is perfect; effective assessment involves both quantitative and qualitative strategies
  – This can be labor-intensive and cost-prohibitive
→ The pathway from research to impact is neither linear nor quick
→ Attribution is challenging when a research study contributes to a body of evidence
→ Knowledge transfer activities are still not rewarded in traditional academic incentives in the U.S.
Application to Population Health Research

→ Challenges in demonstrating impact may be particularly pronounced for population health research
  – Given time lag to realize population health outcomes and challenges with attribution

→ Funders are increasingly rewarding research that can demonstrate impact beyond academia

→ Opportunity for population health researchers to consider the impact of their work in new ways… ways that will resonate with funders and the public