

A systematic evaluation of payback of publicly funded health research in Hong Kong

Objective

We evaluated the outcomes of publicly funded health research in Hong Kong and explored factors associated with the impact of research outcomes on health policy and service provider behaviour.

Methodology

We sent questionnaires to the principal investigators of all projects supported by the *Health Services Research Fund* (HSRF) and *Health Care and Promotion Fund* (HCPF) completed before August 2005 (n=205). The questionnaire gathered information in 6 outcome areas:

- knowledge production,
- use of research in the research system,
- use of research project findings in health system policy / decision making,
- application of the research findings through changed behaviour,
- factors influencing the utilisation of research, and
- health / health service / economic benefits.

Results

178 (86.8%) questionnaires were returned. The mean duration between project completion and questionnaire return was 6.34 years (median 6.25, range 1.75 to 10.92).

Completed projects produced the following outcomes:

- 86.5% generated research publications (mean = 5.4 publications per project),
- 34.3% resulted in career advancement for project team members,
- 38.2% led to acquisition of higher qualifications by project team members,
- 35.4% reported use of project results in policy making,
- 49.4% led to changed behaviour in light of research findings,
- 42.1% produced evidence of health service benefit, and
- 44.9% generated subsequent research.

Payback outcomes were positively associated with the amount of funding awarded and the length of time between project completion and evaluation.

Participation in policy committees and research utilisation through liaison with potential users were significantly associated with:

- health service benefit ($OR_{\text{participation}}=2.9$, 95% CI 1.3-6.4; $OR_{\text{liaison}}=2.0$, 95% CI 1.1-3.9),
- policy and decision-making ($OR_{\text{participation}}=10.5$, 95% CI 4.1-26.8; $OR_{\text{liaison}}=2.5$, 95% CI 1.2-5.3), and
- change in behaviour ($OR_{\text{participation}}=3.7$, 95% CI 1.5-8.8).

Conclusion

The HSRF produced substantial outcomes in all payback categories and compared favourably with similar research funds in other economies.