

GETTING TO IMPACT: Why Knowledge Translation Matters for Researchers

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Part of the AllerGen webinar series: Knowledge Translation for Research Success

Melanie Barwick delivered a webinar in AllerGen's Knowledge Translation (KT) for Research Success series on February 14, 2017, describing how KT is growing in importance for health researchers and identifying tools for integrating KT into research. Her key messages and a hyperlinked index to her presentation follow.

Why think of knowledge translation (KT) for your research?

Much of the evidence produced in health research fails to gain traction. Research scientists can find your publications, but much health research goes unnoticed and, therefore, has little chance of informing policy, clinical practice or benefiting knowledge users. It is estimated that just 14% of the available research evidence enters clinical practice. Several sources suggest that it takes an average of 17 years for evidence to have an impact.

Publishing is not enough. The literature suggests that a publication is not an indicator of impact. It's more an indicator of productivity and scholarship. Of papers published between 1981 and 1985, only 55% indexed by ISI had any citations in the five years after publication. Traditional publishing does not deliver your evidence to everyone who might benefit.

Productivity is not impact. If we're not good at delivering our evidence to those who can use it (our knowledge users), we have a poor return on our research investment. We may feel

successful: we got the grant, concluded it, did all the things that we thought necessary, and we're on to the next study. But that's productivity, not impact. *If we can't demonstrate how people benefited from the evidence we put out there, we aren't effectively demonstrating return on research investment.*

Practice change does not just miraculously happen. One survey in the US found that about 70% of strategic initiatives in hospitals fail. Engineering practice change requires much preparation, at the level of the practitioner, the organization, and often at the level of the system. Effective KT is a crucial part of this.

Your science will be judged by its impact. Your health research will still be judged by your grant funding, publications and h index, but increasingly, it will also be judged by your impact on the public, practice, industry and systems. KT is of growing importance when it comes to funding, grant performance evaluation, and academic promotion.

How to bridge the "know-do" gap with effective KT

Consider the needs of knowledge users. Knowing something about the information needs of your users gives you insight as to whom to share your evidence with, and how. Think about how you are meeting the knowledge needs of people who could use the

information that you're producing. Think about what they need to know, their preferences, and how they might benefit from the information, even if it's not for instrumental reasons. We researchers think we know what the salient, important main messages are coming out of our

research, but we don't always think about what a knowledge user would consider to be most important.

Make your stuff interesting. A research publication stands on its own; researchers in the field will seek it out. But when you produce other KT deliverables tailored to different populations—infographics, plain language summaries, reports, webinars—you must ensure that they are captivating, written in plain language and easily digestible; and that the main messages and the implications of what you share are evident. Please note that plain language is not “dumbing down;” it is making sure that you use clear language to communicate your findings, a concept or an issue. It's easy to do and it's important.

Be clear about your KT goal. In devising a KT plan, your KT goal needs to be very evident: Are you trying to generate awareness? Are you trying to inform research or decision-making, change practice or policy? Are you trying to shift attitudes, to prepare people for the eventuality of changing their behavior down the line? KT activities are not always directed toward making a concrete change in practice, behavior or policy, or toward commercialization.

Develop a plan that maps onto your goal. What strategies will you use to attain your KT

goal? Who is your target audience? What KT expertise do you need on the team? Who are your project partners? When will you engage them? What are their roles going to be? Is this an end-of-grant KT plan, or is it an “integrated KT” plan—that is, will you work collaboratively with your knowledge users throughout the life course of the research project, so you are continuously sharing and building knowledge with them? Make sure your KT strategy aligns with your KT goal and with the needs and preferences of your intended knowledge users.

Evaluate against your goal. How will you gauge impact? Impact can be an indicator, or a story that tells or shows you that people knew what to do with the knowledge you shared. What will your indicators of success be? What resources will you need to track and measure these? How will you budget for this?

Work with knowledge users. For effective KT, you must interact with your knowledge users. This may be time-consuming, but it's important work. *The more engagement and the more buy-in you have with your knowledge users at the beginning and throughout your work, the more likely they are to benefit from or use your research evidence and to partner with you again in the future, and the more likely it is that your research will actually have an impact.*

GLOSSARY

knowledge translation: the strategies and processes that make science findings understandable; a range of activities related to sharing research evidence in a way that people can benefit, or at least so that they can understand (synonymous with: knowledge transfer, knowledge mobilization)

knowledge user: anybody who is going to be a user of the knowledge that you generated through your research (e.g., researchers, policymakers, decision-makers, the public, consumers, patients, industry)

RESOURCES

[KT Planning template](#): a guide to the essential components of KT planning.

[Scientist KT Training](#): a workshop on KT for scientists, educators, policy and decision makers.

[Partner tool](#): a social network analysis tool to help improve collaboration.

[Partnership evaluation tool](#): for measuring the efficacy of partnerships (and integrated KT).

INDEX OF WEBINAR CONTENT

The Importance of Knowledge Translation (KT) for Researchers

Problem statement: why KT?.....	video , slide
From evidence to policy: 368 years (scurvy)	video , slide
Sitting on evidence: we can do better.....	video , slide
Bridging the know-do gap: the science of practise change	video , slide
Publications as indicators of impact	video , slide
Consider the needs of the knowledge user	video , slide
Effective KT? An exercise	video , slide
Changing health practise?	video , slide
Implementing change: plan vs. reality	video , slide
Success rates for change initiatives	video , slide
KT failure.....	video , slide
Impact: what needs to happen	video , slide
KT underpins impact	video , slide
Terms related to KT	video , slide
Implementation Science & KT	video , slide
Where does KT happen in science?.....	video , slide
Understanding Impact.....	video , slide
Relevance of KT for you	video , slide
Translating your research means ...?	video , slide
KT activities and goals.....	video , slide
Key components of a KT plan.....	video , slide
Drivers for improving KT	video , slide

Q & A

Measuring the efficacy of integrated KT	video
KT as a “time-hog”: seeking efficiencies.....	video
Evaluating impact.....	video

Available for this webinar: [slides \(in PDF\)](#) | [video recording](#)

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