THE THIRD COMMUNITY: KNOWLEDGE BROKERS, RESEARCH, AND POLICY

A Report on the Third Annual National Knowledge Brokering Workshop and Professional Development Day of the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation
Vancouver, Canada, October 25-26, 2004

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Main Messages

- It is important to focus on the desired outcomes of knowledge brokering, whether those be general enlightenment, tangible policy, or management change.

- Brokers should be activists, identifying issues, spurring research, and working to get research used in policy-making. They need to bring policy makers/managers and researchers closer together.

- Earning, maintaining, and building trust are essential knowledge brokering activities, both because decision makers turn to people they trust and because knowledge brokering only works (especially in a big country) if the people doing it have a solid network for support and guidance.

- Policy makers are often inundated with information, but what they need is knowledge — synthesized, interpreted, and describing real options for the issue they are dealing with. Brokers need to know where to find it, how to package it, and when to deliver it.

- Policy makers need information fast; effective knowledge brokers know government timelines and work with them.

- Information must be concise, relevant, and compelling — “bumper sticker” summaries of issues.

- Partnerships are key to success in all aspects of brokering and policy-making. Partners have experience, insights, and practices that can save time and trouble in the search for solutions; working with others helps build broad support for your ideas.

- Don’t save up information for a “big bang” moment at the end of a project; share with others, start making changes, and learn as you go.
The Third Community: Knowledge Brokers, Research, and Policy

Introduction

The most resonant message from the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation’s third annual knowledge brokering workshop was clear, pervasive, and uncompromising: knowledge brokering must lead to action.

From the beginning, the foundation’s knowledge brokering initiatives have focused on building relationships to encourage the flow of information between researchers and decision makers to increase the use of research-based evidence. Given the gulf between the two groups, it made sense to have that concern uppermost in mind. But too little attention has been paid to ensuring the relationships we build actually lead to something. Knowledge brokering is not merely a social event; its purpose is to ensure decision makers have solid research and researchers available to them, and its goal must be productive change.

Speakers at the late-October workshop in Vancouver made it clear it’s time for action and for results. It is time for knowledge brokers to build on the “linkage and exchange” theory and make a commitment to linking people, exchanging knowledge, and achieving goals. Knowledge brokering is about relationships, but there is increasing caution against forgetting the ultimate goal. Successful brokering must have definite goals behind the human connections. Brokers can’t afford to hang back; we may even have to help define and set these goals.

The importance of trust — earning it, maintaining it, building on it — was another recurrent message from the Vancouver workshop. Government officials are always under the gun. They need information fast, and that means they have to be able to trust the source if they have time to make only one or two calls before recommending an action or making a decision.

Brokers, too, need to trust, because brokering will only really be able to function in this huge country if there is a true network of brokers reaching out, sharing information, and
offering tips on best practices. It’s up to brokers, starting among ourselves, to forge the links and make the exchanges that will let widespread people and disparate groups learn from each other and work together. We must increase our skills for building partnerships so we can draw on the skills and expertise of others when time is short.

Although the two days in Vancouver were officially divided into the third annual knowledge brokering workshop and a professional development day, the focus of both was the same: how policy is developed and how knowledge brokers and researchers can be part of the process. Over both days, some speakers discussed the theory of knowledge brokering while others offered how-tos, real-life examples of trying to make knowledge brokering work.

Many people attended both days, some chose one or the other. Everyone had the chance to hear challenging and entertaining speakers, many of whom have experience on both sides of the research/policy divide, through working at different times as both academics and decision makers. Because of the way the speakers’ ideas complemented each other over the two days, this report is not chronological; instead, we’ve merged ideas and grouped speakers by themes, not by place on the agenda. We hope you’ll find it a useful record of two intriguing days spent discussing the role of research in policy, the process of policy-making — and where brokers must work to connect the two.

**Bridging the Gap**

Knowledge brokering has a longer history than most of us realize, although not under that name. But as early as the 1960s, academics were taking tentative steps toward directing their research to decision makers, and by the 1970s people were beginning to study the relationship between researchers and policy makers and how it could be improved.

The keynote speaker at the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation’s annual knowledge brokering workshop was Geoffrey Oldham, who is an honorary professor of science policy at the University of Sussex and a leading international thinker on knowledge brokering. Dr. Oldham started by describing his first knowledge brokering effort, a weekend conference for government decision makers staged about two years after the launch of the Science and Policy Research Unit at Sussex in 1966. “We wanted to be
useful and our results to be used. It was perhaps a rather naïve aspiration,” he said.

From the start, that first meeting was a disappointment. Academics and decision makers talked at cross purposes and none of the hoped-for exchange of ideas or planning for research and policy happened. At the end, a leading government official harshly disabused the Sussex group of the idea they might influence his work. Policy makers, the official said, are horse traders. “I’ve been horse trading every day, all day. I have no opportunity for any evidence-based knowledge or any policy research. Science policy is like every other field of policy-making, it’s politics, and if you think in your university you’re going to have an influence on that, don’t. You’re wasting your time.”

Dr. Oldham was determined to prove him wrong, but the task was not easy, as was made clear when Margaret Thatcher became prime minister and the pressure was on academics to show how their work had real impact. Most research, he found, influenced policy by shaping the general climate of opinion in which the policy was created; direct hits, where they communicated a piece of research to the right person at the right time and saw it make a difference, were rare.

### Three Models for Influencing Policy

As Geoffrey Oldham looked for literature on transferring research into policy, he came upon Patricia Thomas’s 1985 book, *The Aims and Outcomes of Social Research* (Croom Helm). Ms. Thomas gives three models for influencing policy. In the **limestone model**, research published in journals or books initially attracts attention. Gradually, however, it grows less prominent, like a river in a limestone landscape that slowly carves out a crevice, then winds up underground in a stagnate lake of overlooked knowledge. At some point, however, a policy broker looking for evidence may come along and, realizing the old research’s significance, bring it to the attention of decision makers. Second is the **gadfly model**. Gadflies are researchers who think the work they have done is so important they pester government officials, try to see the minister, and even give press conferences to try to get their research made into policy. The **insider model** is similar to the gadfly approach, except that here, when researchers are convinced their research is crucially important, they
go and work for government, perhaps on secondment, for a year or two. The point is to get to a position where they can lobby for change most effectively.

**Seize the Moment — Two Sides of Timeliness**

Dr. Oldham’s next step in understanding the complex relationship of research and policy was to work with the Australian government to learn about how, when, and where it used research. Subsequently, he did similar work in China and then Canada. He found, through interviews with many officials in all three countries, that the needs of policy makers around the world are very similar. Over the course of the Vancouver workshop and professional development day, it became clear that many of the other speakers see the same themes emerge in any consideration of research use in policy-making.

It was no surprise for an audience of people involved in knowledge brokering to be told the most important issue for decision makers in getting evidence is timeliness. Decisions, Dr. Oldham said, have three time horizons: short term, which is pretty much same day, medium term, which is three weeks, and long term, which is about 18 months.

Decision makers told Dr. Oldham that how they gather knowledge for their decisions varies greatly with the time available. For short-term issues, decision makers need a trusted advisor or academic for immediate advice. Long-term questions can be farmed out to a committee or academic for study. The tough ones are the medium-term ones, where decision makers need something more authoritative than they can get in a day but don’t have time for new research.

This three-week horizon is perhaps the most crucial gap for knowledge brokers to try to fill, Dr. Oldham said, and he described two efforts to fill medium-term needs. One is the Oxford Analytica, which has a stable of experts around the world who are contracted to provide a 500- to 1,000-word piece on developments in their field within 24 hours of an issue arising in the news, which is passed on to Analytica subscribers. Another was a virtual advisory board Dr. Oldham helped set up for the post-apartheid South African government, a group of experts who promised to check daily on a web site to see if they
could offer advice on problems that arose during a three-week conference as the new government developed its science policy. Both follow his preferred, “institutional” approach to knowledge brokering; he expressed concern that the broker-as-connected-individual model we tend to lean toward will shut out valuable international knowledge and prevent access to our knowledge by developing countries.

The other side of timing is the importance of researchers pacing their initiatives to influence policy very carefully. Duncan Sinclair, a fellow of the School of Policy Studies at Queen’s University and former chair of the Health Services Restructuring Commission in Ontario, who spoke at the professional development day, told the audience “the political track is a very short one and it’s very selective,” because after 14 to 16 months in power a new government starts to worry about getting re-elected and begins to shy away from policy initiatives. To have a chance at promoting change in that brief window, Dr. Sinclair said, “You should begin about 12 months before the election. You work on the people who might be elected and you plant the idea and you get it pretty well developed. If it’s not implemented within that first 16 months, forget it.”

Later on the second day, Barry Carin, associate director of the Centre for Global Studies at the University of Victoria, also spoke about timing. A senior federal public servant for many years in several departments, he said you need to know government timelines and work to them. If your proposed policy change will need funding, you have to start seeding the idea in time to be included in the next budget. The speech from the throne — for which governments always need fresh ideas — is another chance to introduce a policy proposal.

But Dr. Carin stressed there is an even more important timing issue than the split-second launch of an idea — persistence. To make policy changes happen requires a long-term commitment to keep the idea going until it is well-established. “Things take time,” he told workshop participants. “The final report should be the mid-point. You’ve got to tailor your communication, your dissemination, your persuasion campaign to the complexity of the research. If it took two years to do the research, it’s going to take two years to sell it.”

Dr. Carin gave the example of an initiative he led when he worked for the federal government to eliminate the family allowance program. It took 10 years to phase out the
universal payment and replace it with a tax credit which benefited those who needed it most. But if it had been done any faster, the government and the public would have rejected the change. In another example, a plan to get welfare mothers working failed because he didn’t stay in the department long enough to see the policy put in place without changes — changes which deeply undermined its intent.

**The Third Community**

The emergence of knowledge brokers, a third community being built up between researchers and policy makers, has sped up transmission of ideas and helped academics produce evidence that policy makers actually need, according to Michael Howlett, who opened the professional development day.

Dr. Howlett, a professor of political science at Simon Fraser University who specializes in public policy analysis, said brokers can also break down “monopolies on advice” by bringing in more ideas, which gives rise to a kind of competitive model of evidence supply and increases options for decision makers.

Dr. Howlett used a broad definition of knowledge broker, which includes everyone from government committees, ministries, and commissions to consultants, special interest groups, and “activated academics.” Until the third community started to grow, there were just the two communities, researchers and policy makers, and there were distinct boundaries between them. Getting research into policy was a matter of trying to reduce the thickness of those boundaries. Now there are brokers, whose job that is. But even so, we are not very good at brokering in Canada, he said.

In Britain, the United States, and elsewhere, think-tanks, political parties, unions, and public interest groups are actively involved in trying to affect government policy. In Canada, political parties are electoral machines, unions focus their efforts on collective bargaining, and 85 percent of public interest groups have no research capacity. Royal commissions are infrequent and the few think-tanks have poor research capacity. Nor do the media do the job: reporters here don’t do the kind of investigative journalism that can affect how governments operate.
“What’s required on the part of brokers in the research community is activism,” said Dr. Howlett. Effective knowledge brokers must recognize that enlightenment is no longer enough; we need to build up the research and dissemination capacity of all kinds of organizations and encourage their involvement in policy development. The activism he wants to see is a committed attempt by researchers, policy makers, and brokers to develop brokering itself, so there is more capacity to do it and it becomes more effective.

Meet, Mix, Communicate

How can Canada improve its capacity to do knowledge brokering? Simon Fraser University’s Michael Howlett quoted Peter M. Haas, a professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst:

• Create multidisciplinary teams.

• Hold special meetings to educate policy makers on research.

• Build networks by identifying shared core values.

• Don’t let one discipline or school of thought dominate discussions.

• Train researchers who communicate well to share ideas with other academics, government, media, and the public.

• Look for expertise in your own country; governments will listen more.

The Schmooze Imperative

Duncan Sinclair of Queen’s has worked on both sides of the decision-maker and research divide, and he believes knowledge brokering must, essentially, be local. “The foreign expert who comes along with a bag full of slides is not going to do it for you no matter how compelling.” The third community Dr. Howlett referred to will only succeed as a network of cells, because the inclination of decision makers to trust only those in their immediate vicinity is very strong, Dr. Sinclair said.
But, even locally, how do you establish a relationship? “There’s only one way to become a credible knowledge broker, and that is you’ve got to do a lot of schmoozing,” Dr. Sinclair said. “For those of us who are action-oriented people, it can be really, really frustrating, but it’s time very, very well spent.” (Dr. Oldham said an official in China told him the same thing: he did his knowledge transfer by taking policy makers out for their favourite food, then timing his pitch just right — far enough into the meal that they were no longer too hungry to pay attention, but not so late there was no time for discussion. Dr. Oldham said he was unsuccessful in attempts to get himself an entertainment budget, however.)

Knowledge brokering is really a sales job, Dr. Sinclair said, and to be successful in sales you have to know your customer, the decision maker. Most important is to establish whether the person you’re trying to influence is a change agent or a resister, because policy-making and decision-making are essentially about change. “Don’t write off those people who are resistant to change… Overcoming resistance to a particular policy issue may be far more important than arming the champion of the change with overwhelming information.”

Always discover what is motivating your decision maker, Dr. Sinclair said, adding there are really only three possibilities. The first is idealism, doing something because it’s the right thing to do. Second is the carrot or the stick; that is, you’ll be better off if you do it or worse off if you don’t do it. The third motivation is money, whether it’s saving it, making it, or not losing it. Idealism is quite rare, Dr. Sinclair said, so most decisions, whether they’re in government, academia, or industry, come down to money and the impact of action or inaction.

There are five common elements that make for successful lobbying campaigns to change policy, Barry Carin told the workshop, quoting Managing Global Issues: Lessons Learned (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001). The first is effective framing, explaining the issue in a brief but compelling way (Dr. Carin called it the bumper sticker), so the policy change needed is clear and has emotional resonance. Second, successful campaigns are partnerships, and third, those partnerships are cohesive and strong enough to last.
“Unfortunately, money is very helpful,” was Dr. Carin’s fourth point. “One rule of thumb in international campaigns is the closer you get to spending as much money on communication, on dissemination and publicity as on research, the more likely you are to succeed.” That can go as far as commissioning polls or research to back up your idea. “Money triggers action.” Finally, timing it right is essential.

**Four Functions of a Knowledge Broker**

If you want to be a broker, there are four attributes which are indispensable to success, Barry Carin told the professional development day participants. Brokers must be **storytellers**, concise and to the point, but able to compose a narrative. “You’ve got to somehow come up with the bumper sticker that’s graphic,” he said. Next, echoing Dr. Sinclair, he emphasized the importance of **networking**. Perhaps more cynical than some of the other speakers, perhaps simply more blunt, he suggested that networking is necessary to keep people from working against you. A broker must be an **engineer** who understands implementation, because implementers are the front-line people who will actually enact the new policy. Without them, you will not succeed. Finally, a broker is a **fixer**, someone who can “oil [his or her] way around the dance floor,” and knows just when to make a pitch, and to whom.

**The Role of Research and Getting it Used**

The fact the phrase “evidence-based decision-making” has to exist speaks volumes, and no one at either the workshop or the professional development day in Vancouver was under the illusion that research plays anything like the part it should in directing policy or that policy needs inform the research agenda enough. Still, some statistics from Michael Howlett were disturbing.

There are three ways to use research, according to a 1985 study by David Whiteman published in *Western Political Quarterly*, quoted by Dr. Howlett. The first is **substantive**: the policy makers have no preference for one position over the other and are genuinely looking for the evidence that will guide them. The second is **elaborative**, where the policy
alternatives are known, and the search is for evidence to elaborate and refine the desired policy position. The third use is **strategic**, where alternatives are known, one is preferred, and all the decision makers want is evidence to support what they have already decided to do.

In his study, Whiteman looked at the use of research by congressional committees in the United States. He found substantive use was rare, with decision makers coming to new information with truly open minds only about one-third of the time. By far the most common use was refining policy ideas within established boundaries: research was used in this elaborative way 84 percent of the time.

Strategic use was also fairly common, however. Research was used to establish the merit of a preferred policy 56 percent of the time — which Dr. Sinclair said is one of the most frustrating things for people trying to encourage the use of research in policy. Governments, he said, make decisions for political or financial reasons, and when they say they’re ready to make a decision it’s because they already have “and they will do something that most of us find really quite objectionable… [They] want from the knowledge broker evidence that will support that decision, not in fact that will inform that decision.”

**Packaging the Product**

Clearly, actually influencing policy makers with research is not easy. Timing is crucial, and networking and schmoozing are needed to pave the way. What other factors matter? Just as several speakers referred to brokering as selling ideas, the language of marketing can creep into discussion of how to present research. Packaging is important, and having the right product is, too.

Dr. Oldham said policy makers complained of too often being inundated with information when what they need is knowledge, filtered and synthesized with other evidence. One thing about the limestone model, Dr. Oldham told a questioner, is that it does some of that synthesis; as the original research filters down, it blends with other knowledge. It is this point, downstream from its original form, that research will have the most value. “Don’t go
back to the original. Go to the literature and find the pooled knowledge,” he said.

Dr. Sinclair, too, stressed the importance of finding the relevant knowledge and then getting it into a format useful to decision markers. He compared knowledge brokers to modern-day librarians who, rather than acting as passive “keepers of records and seals,” actively synthesize research and connect users with information relevant to their problems — and even to problems they didn’t know they had!

Like Dr. Oldham, Dr. Sinclair emphasized this synthesis, and also brevity. “The worst thing, in my experience, for a decision maker is for you to say ‘It’s right here in this stack of literature,’” said Dr. Sinclair. “Learning how to translate information into language that people you want to communicate with can and will understand eagerly is a key thing.”

Speaker Rick Blickstead, of the Wellesley Central Health Corporation, which funds research and action on urban health issues, said they have a writer turn every piece of research they fund into plain language. Dr. Carin warned information must be prepared differently for different audiences, depending, perhaps, on their level in an organization, or who influences them, or their role in making the decision.

Dr. Sinclair also said one person can’t know all the relevant knowledge on any issue, which is why teams are so important in knowledge transfer — different people bring different strengths to the effort.

Dr. Carin warned against counting too much on the written word, however succinct. “People don’t read,” he warned. However hard you work to produce a one-page brief on your topic, it will probably never be more than a useful memory aide for you. This is why he recommends thinking in terms of creating a bumper sticker: the message should be that clear-cut and compelling. He recommended using humour; a cartoon that captures your idea will stick in people’s minds more than PowerPoint ever will. Since people also don’t listen, it helps to be funny. People will pay more attention when you speak if others are laughing, because everyone hates the idea they’ve missed a joke.

Dr. Sinclair, Dr. Oldham, and Dr. Carin all warned against going to the top to transfer knowledge. Working with someone at your own level is your best approach, Dr. Carin
said, and Dr. Oldham said identifying the key person to influence takes time but is important. “Somewhere down the line, there will be an individual, probably in an advisory position, who has got the responsibility of dealing with the thing where you have some information, some knowledge to try and influence him. So you first of all do a lot of research to find out who the key person is to reach.”

Trust in the broker is paramount. Whomever you reach, they will not react well until they feel they can trust you. Time, experience, schmoozing, credibility — building trust is also something that requires persistence.

### Wicked Problems

One of the challenges to getting research used in decision-making is the extraordinarily difficult problems managers are dealing with. These problems, complex and interlinked with other issues, have been dubbed “wicked problems” by consultants E. Jeffrey Conklin and William Weil. Ted Bruce, executive director of the primary healthcare network at the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, told the professional development day participants that healthcare is particularly prone to wicked problems. There are four criteria for wicked problems:

- They are an evolving set of interlocking issues, so there is no definitive statement of the problem and you don’t truly understand the problem until you have developed a solution.
- There are many stakeholders who will be affected by the decision.
- The constraints on the solution, such as limited resources or political considerations, change over time.
- Without a clear problem, there is never a definitive solution.

Mr. Bruce described the “wicked problem” of emergency room overcrowding. Is it a failure of primary care, so people go to emergency rather than to family doctors? Perhaps, but family doctors are reluctant to take on more work and emergency doctors don’t want to lose income. Is it caused by not having enough hospital beds? Perhaps if patients were discharged faster emergency would clear — except with less in-patient care, people are more likely to wind up back at emergency because something has gone wrong. Is it the “high five,” the five percent of the population that uses 30 percent of health resources? Fixing that is not going to be easy. Conklin and Weil say dealing with wicked problems is a social process, involving all stakeholders, which ends when you run out of time, energy, or resources, not because you have found the perfect solution.
Strategy, Policy, and Practicality

It is not enough to be friends, Ted Bruce of the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority told the professional development day. “I’ve often tried to compare the relationship between decision makers and researchers and the knowledge transfer community as kind of the early first dating stage, which is a little bit of a sad commentary,” he said. “We really haven’t even started going steady yet as a community and we’ve got to get there fairly soon.”

In his work developing a strategy for primary healthcare in Vancouver, and in earlier policy development positions, Mr. Bruce has had plenty of opportunity to observe the relationship between policy makers and researchers and knowledge brokers. Sometimes research can play more of a role, sometimes less, but there are some common factors to developing successful policy solutions.

There are two kinds of decisions in healthcare, strategic and operational, Mr. Bruce said. Strategic decisions are more policy-oriented, focusing on establishing a vision and the systems changes that vision might lead to. Research is crucial to making those decisions well, but values and hidden assumptions will often have more sway in the long run.

Operational decisions are focused on solving short-term problems. Usually a question of trying to balance competing demands, they need quick answers, but at the same time, the people making them tend to be risk averse. “It’s a real dilemma for the decision maker who is asked to make a decision quickly, get short-term results, but don’t create any risks.” Ideally, an organization uses research to develop an overall strategy, which can then be used as a framework for making the short-term decisions.

Mr. Bruce added that there are many constraints on strategic and operational decisions in healthcare — often, as in the case of government budgets, union contracts, and illness itself, the action needed to bring in a solution is beyond the power of the organization.

However, some factors make decisions easier, he said. Knowledge brokers, for instance, could help healthcare organizations get better data on which to base their decisions. The more detailed the health-related information available, the easier choices should become,
Mr. Bruce said. Some other factors that improve decision-making:

- Sharing a common vision makes deciding policy easier; if all the people working on a problem have a clearly defined goal they agree on, the strategy needed to get there will likely be less contentious.

- A commitment to adopting the best practices of others and rigorous evaluation of new approaches tried lets decision makers find the most effective solutions to problems.

- Working with stakeholders to find answers produces better solutions — and they are more likely to be accepted.

- Funding must be available to support change, and it must be sustained long enough to get the change working properly and to be properly evaluated.

- Researchers, policy makers, and administrators should work together — perhaps spending a day a week in each others’ offices — to learn the real scope of problems and possibility of solutions.

Knowledge brokering is growing in Canada, but our strength does not match the need for our work. It is time for more focused, goal-oriented, practical efforts to put research to work. A knowledge broker is not a kind of enthusiastic courier, carrying messages back and forth between two disparate groups. Brokering is the third community, but it is now an essential part of the greater community that creates policy.

Brokers need to become aggressive, by driving change through involvement in identifying problems and finding and interpreting information, and also by building teams of interested parties, from researchers and policy makers to implementers and the public. Brokers must be goal setters, as well as provide guidance to other people on reaching the goals they have set.
Mapping the Route

Barry Carin offered participants a checklist of steps to follow to get policy proposals accepted. Often referred to as “mapping,” the checklists are a guide to moving policy. The first step, identifying which decision you want to affect, is more difficult than it looks, but once you have established the goal, you follow the map:

- Which decisions does one want to affect?
- What is the scope of those decisions?
- Who has a role in making or influencing the decisions?
- What is the process of making the decisions?
- What factors will be taken into account in making the decisions?
- What is the best strategy for affecting the decisions?
- What skills are required to do so?
- What specific actions should be taken?
Knowledge Brokering Tools and Resources

Case studies presented at the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation’s Third Annual Knowledge Brokering Workshop
October 25, 2004

All of us need to pool what we know to move knowledge brokering forward. Thus, case studies are an important part of the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation’s annual brokering workshop.

At Vancouver in October 2004, the range of experience and wisdom of the speakers meant it was sometimes a little difficult to know where theory left off and example began; what follows are insights into knowledge brokering efforts at four organizations, three in Canada and one in Australia.

Laying a Foundation

Creating a viable knowledge transfer process was not an option for Debby Cousins. Her organization, the Australian Biosecurity Cooperative Research Centre for Emerging Infectious Disease, is a joint venture among many institutions, launched in late 2003 to protect the country from new infectious diseases (either previously unknown, like SARS, or new to Australia, which has never had foot and mouth disease, for example). Its three-prong research program involves studying technologies to enhance detection, the ecology of emerging infectious diseases, and advanced surveillance systems. “It was very important to have an effective knowledge exchange strategy to prove to people who were making the decisions that we had an effective means of translating the research into products and policy,” Dr. Cousins said.

Debby Cousins’s Four Goals of Knowledge Exchange

- To facilitate effective research collaborations
- To guide the strategic direction of the organization — bio-security issues change daily and keeping up to date is a must
- To enhance communication networks
- To support effective dissemination and uptake of new knowledge
To develop the cooperative’s transfer program she and colleagues travelled more than 11,000 kilometres and did workshops with more than 60 people. Based on that, they identified four types of knowledge brokers:

**Project-based brokers** sit on the project reference group to oversee the work, and they work with end users and researchers to match research and needs. The job also involves encouraging research and educational collaborations and establishing links among the relevant sectors.

**Issue-based brokers** help co-ordinate responses in both the research and educational training programs to identify bio-security issues, keeping all parts of the cooperative responsive to high-priority issues and encouraging them to work together to find answers.

**Network-based brokers** are responsible for increasing co-ordination across the national bio-security system, keeping tabs on the big picture, including the global environment. They’re members of international networks and are expected to report on regular meetings and brief the cooperative on breaking issues.

**Program-based brokers** are the co-ordinators of the three research programs and the co-ordinators of the education and application programs. The brokering part of their jobs is to build links among their groups and the other programs through networking and briefings.

Dr. Cousins said one of the great challenges they face in introducing and winning support for knowledge brokering is finding ways to measure and evaluate its effectiveness. They ask brokers to put the title in their job descriptions and have designed spread sheets for them to record the time they spend on brokering (they don’t have the money to have full-time brokers), but finding effective quantitative and qualitative measures is proving a challenge.

They want to be sure they are getting real results, however. “We expect the knowledge broker to be both a relationship builder *and* a deal maker. It’s no good going along and just having a quiet cup of tea and sort of getting people in contact and feeling all warm and fuzzy about it. You really have to come up with an outcome at the end of the day.”
Building Bridges

The focus at the knowledge brokering workshop tends to be on linking the research, policy, and decision-maker communities, but two of the speakers brought insights into reaching out to the community in its most basic sense — the public whom they are trying to serve, either directly or through community organizations.

Rick Blickstead, CEO of the Wellesley Central Health Corporation, set out to “challenge the knowledge privilege” when he led the move to take the money from the sale of the old Wellesley Hospital site in Toronto and create an organization dedicated to promoting and researching health in downtown areas. He wants to move academics away from creating knowledge for the sake of creating it and get them to make a commitment to working for the public good.

“We want real results for real people right now. We’re trying to say maybe research needs to shape the agenda and look at a different reality.” Wellesley Central, he said, is following the business model: identify a customer need, get it researched, and do the policy change necessary to meet the need.

The approach makes many people unhappy because it is contrary to the tradition of research as objective observation — an idea so well entrenched, some academic journals actually discourage researchers from making recommendations based on their findings. But that is rewarding people for publishing, not for benefiting others, Mr. Blickstead said.
Rick Blickstead’s Seven Tips for Goal-Oriented Research

- Partners are like friends; you can never have too many.

- Always include members of the community your research is aimed at in the project; Wellesley Central won’t fund projects that don’t.

- Make the complex simple, make things easier for people to understand.

- Have briefings all along — research knowledge isn’t really a great epiphany that comes only at the end of a project.

- Plan on the run; the pressure for solutions doesn’t allow time for doing it in advance.

- You’ll spend 90 percent of your time getting 70 percent of the solution; let the other 30 percent go.

- Depend on best practices; there isn’t time or money to do the same work twice.

The same themes came through in Nancy Humber’s presentation on community forums, which she calls “a tool for knowledge exchange in the healthcare community.” Although healthcare restructuring in Quebec changed where she worked just before the Vancouver workshop, Dr. Humber was director of professional and organizational development at the centres locaux de services communautaires (CLSC) in Pointe-Claire, Québec, a suburb of Montreal, when she developed her community forums.

The example she gave was of a forum planned for Child Mental Health Day. They wanted to share recent research findings — including that higher socio-economic status is more associated with depression than lower status — and discuss what the risk factors were and what could be changed in the community to mitigate them.
Nancy Humber’s Seven Tips for Working with the Community

- Go to their space, a place that is familiar to them; don’t bring them to your world.
- The knowledge broker should be known to the community; outsiders will be harder to trust.
- Consider the cost; is what you’re doing worthwhile from a participant’s point of view? A day of someone’s time is a big sacrifice to a small agency.
- Find a day that suits the community, not your schedule.
- Keep presentations short and not too academic; researchers may need help with this.
- Don’t present abstract research; it should be possible to act on the information you share.
- Get feedback to the community quickly and make sure you let them know what decisions are made.

The experience has been good, Dr. Humber said, partly because they took care to work with academics and decision makers who were enthusiastic and — perhaps most difficult — flexible enough to listen and make changes in response to the participants’ suggestions. “What was new for them was for managers to be able to listen to the community and perhaps make decisions that were not typical decisions.”

The Leaky Release

Saskatchewan’s Health Quality Council has the challenging task of measuring and reporting on quality of care in the province and promoting quality improvement. It has no authority to order changes; instead it works with organizations to encourage best practices.

In an earlier incarnation of the organization, director of linkage and exchange Maureen Bingham said, they used the “big bang” approach for reports on delivery and quality of healthcare in the province. They kept everything as secret as possible and, with only brief advance warning, gave the results to health regions and media alike. It led to defensiveness and dissention. The new “leaky release” strategy is designed to take the surprise and the blame out of the process and encourage improvement.
The LINKS Concept

Learning
Innovating
Networking
Knowing
Sharing

To do a leaky release, the HQC starts with some basic networking by phone and e-mail — asking informed people whom they think might be interested in the topic. The suggested participants are invited to join the LINKS team and asked what level of involvement they’d like: low (keep me in the loop); medium (I have expertise, you can call on me); or high (I will be a quality improvement champion).

LINKS team members, including caregivers, administrators, clients, and patients, are sent regular e-mail updates on the research project and preliminary results sharing is arranged for any interested regions. In turn, they keep their own organizations informed of what’s going on. Often, the result is that quality improvements are already underway in a region or facility before the report is released. That takes pressure off managers and providers because they are already acting on the problem. It also stimulates regions to talk to each other about what works and what doesn’t.

There is the risk that news of the report will get to the media earlier than planned; HQC takes care to work closely with their communications team throughout each project. “Where there are huge political concerns, you would have to be a little more careful. We just kept saying these are very preliminary, these numbers may change,” Ms Bingham said.

HQC’s unofficial motto is “We’re building this bridge as we drive on it,” and Katherine Stevenson, a knowledge exchange consultant at the council, told the meeting “We are trying to create a culture of quality improvement. Reporting on the quality of health services is not about punishing, it’s about helping people use health services research in combination with knowledge about best practices to improve service delivery and, ultimately, patient and client outcomes.”
### APPENDIX A

**Agenda**

**Canadian Health Services Research Foundation**

**Third Annual National Knowledge Brokering Workshop**

**Renaissance Vancouver Hotel Harbourside**

**Monday October 25, 2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session/Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30 – 9:00</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 – 9:15</td>
<td>Welcome and introductions (Irving Gold)</td>
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#### SESSION 1: International Knowledge Brokering Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:15 – 9:45</td>
<td>Presentation: Geoffrey Oldham</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:45 – 10:15</td>
<td>Q/A and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15 – 10:45</td>
<td>Networking time and refreshments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45 – 11:15</td>
<td>Presentation: Debby Cousins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:15 – 11:45</td>
<td>Q/A and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45 – 12:30</td>
<td>Breakout groups and plenary reporting session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 – 1:30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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#### SESSION 2: Knowledge Brokering Tools and Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:30 – 1:35</td>
<td>Introductions (Irving Gold)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:35 – 3:00</td>
<td>Panel presentations: knowledge brokering tools</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Maureen Bingham (Health Quality Council, Saskatchewan)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Richard Blickstead (Wellesley Central Health Corp.)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Nancy Humber (CLSC, Lac St-Louis)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:00 – 3:30</td>
<td>Networking time and refreshments</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:30 – 4:15</td>
<td>Breakout groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:15 – 4:45</td>
<td>Plenary reporting session</td>
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#### SESSION 3: Foundation Updates

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>4:45 – 5:15</td>
<td>Update on knowledge brokering program and workshop wrap-up (Irving Gold)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30 – 7:00</td>
<td>Cocktail reception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8:30 – 9:00  Breakfast
9:00 – 9:15  Welcome and introductions (Irving Gold)

SESSION 1:  Panel presentations on the theory and practice of
decision making in the Canadian context

09:15 – 10:15  Panel presentations
Panellists:
- Ted Bruce (Vancouver Coastal Health)
- Michael Howlett (Simon Fraser University)
- Barry Carin (University of Victoria)
- Duncan Sinclair (Queen’s University)

10:15 – 10:45  Q/A and discussion
10:45 – 11:00  Networking time and refreshments

SESSION 2:  Discussions based on the panel presentations

11:00 – 12:00  Breakout groups
12:00 – 12:30  Plenary reporting session
12:30 – 1:30  Lunch

SESSION 3:  Fishbowl exercise

1:30 – 1:45  Instructions for the exercise
1:45 – 2:30  Exercise
2:30 – 3:00  Plenary reporting session
3:00 – 3:30  Wrap up comments (Lillian Bayne)
3:30  Adjournment
OUR PURPOSE

Vision
Our vision is a strong Canadian healthcare system that is guided by solid, research-based management and policy decisions.

Mission
Our mission is to support evidence-based decision-making in the organization, management and delivery of health services through funding research, building capacity and transferring knowledge.

Approach
Our focus is on the people who run the health system, as well as health services researchers. We help them get involved in research that makes a difference, help them produce, find and apply new knowledge to improve management and policy decisions, and bring the two groups together so they can each influence each other’s work and share ideas and experiences.

NOTRE RAISON D’ÊTRE

Vision
Notre vision est celle d’un système de santé canadien fort qui est guidé par une gestion et des politiques solides, fondées sur la recherche.

Mission
Notre mission est d’appuyer la prise de décision fondée sur les données probantes dans l'organisation, la gestion et la prestation des services de santé par l'entremise de programmes de financement de la recherche, de développement des capacités et de transfert de connaissances.

Approche
Nous visons les gens qui dirigent le système de santé de même que les chercheurs des services de santé. Nous les aidons à participer à des recherches qui font une différence, puis à produire, à trouver et à appliquer de nouvelles connaissances qui amélioreront la gestion et les décisions des responsables de politiques. Nous réunissons ensuite les deux groupes afin qu'ils puissent exercer une influence mutuelle sur leurs travaux et échanger des idées et des expériences.