Busting the silos: knowledge brokering in Canada

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Knowledge Transfer
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the Scientific Basis of Health Services
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What this is all based on:

- Regional consultations across Canada in which we met with close to 200 knowledge brokers working in Canada’s health system
- National meeting to confirm findings, create consensus and check assumptions
- Extensive literature review on brokering in a variety of disciplines
We need to go beyond dissemination

Knowledge transfer is still widely thought of in terms of researchers producing research and then disseminating it (push)

Some have begun to focus on helping decision makers access, appraise, adapt and apply research (pull)

Review of 24 studies that asked over 2000 policy makers what facilitated or prevented their use of research evidence. #1 = personal contact! Innvaer et al. J Hlth Serv Res Pol 2002; 7:241

dissemination and uptake strategies are necessary but not sufficient in many cases
Some researchers and decision makers are going beyond separate dissemination and uptake efforts and are engaging in *true joint knowledge production*. When this model is used, many still encounter difficult barriers to effective collaboration and exchange. The most commonly mentioned were:

- A lack of understanding of each other’s culture and work environment
- A lack of a common language
- A lack of understanding of the relative roles and responsibilities in the process

Relationships between researchers and decision makers are needed to overcome these barriers.
Brokering is about building these relationships

- Brokering is about building and nurturing relationships between those involved in joint knowledge production
  - Finding the right people and linking them
  - Helping to set agendas and facilitating their interactions

- Brokering is also about building relationships between communities
  - Understanding each others realities
  - Creating a common language and frame of reference
  - Helping to establish realistic expectations, roles and responsibilities
Brokering can be done in a variety of settings

- Knowledge brokering organizations
  - CHSRF and other funding agencies
- Individuals or teams in research organizations
  - CHEPA, CRC on freshwater ecology in Australia
- Individuals or teams in decision-making organizations
  - Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux
We’re (only) part of the way there!

- A significant amount of brokering is happening
- It is rarely called brokering (a great deal of what is called brokering is not really brokering)
- Very little of it is formal
- Much of it goes completely unrecognized
- Virtually none of it is done by full-time workers
- Little resources are attached to these people
- Virtually no evaluation has been done on the importance of the role
There are some overarching tasks and abilities

- Understanding of both the research and decision making environments
- Ability to find and assess relevant research
- Entrepreneurial skills (networking, problem-solving skills, innovative solutions, etc)
- Mediation and negotiation
- Understanding of the principles of adult learning
- Communication skills
- Credibility…
There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’

- What brokering entails (skills and activities) will be dependant on the context in which it occurs
  - Research vs. decision-making environment
  - Organizations with rich KT strategies vs...
  - Existing research (recombinant?) vs...

- But… if the true goal is to bridge communities, brokering is built on a solid understanding of all the relevant environments
There is work to do!

- **Network**: identify and bring together those doing knowledge brokering in Canada
- **Training**: help brokers identify tools and resources to help them improve and maximize their skills
- **Evaluation**: evaluate the impact of knowledge brokering so that organizations can more comfortably dedicate necessary resources
Thank You!

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