

Busting the silos: knowledge brokering in Canada



Irving Gold and Julie Villeneuve
Knowledge Transfer
**5th International Conference on
the Scientific Basis of Health Services**
Washington, DC



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



Relationships matter!

- 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!

For more information about our knowledge brokering initiative, contact:

Irving Gold – goldi@chsrf.ca

Julie Villeneuve – villenej@chsrf.ca

www.chsrf.ca