Characteristics of High-Impact Investigator-Initiated Research: Results from Selected Case Studies

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BACKGROUND

- Historically, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) has been a key funder of investigator-initiated health services research (HSR) on health care costs, productivity, organization, and market forces.
- The extent to which AHRQ-funded HSR has been used to inform policy debates and decisions is not well understood.

OBJECTIVES

- To conduct in-depth case studies of selected AHRQ-funded, investigator-initiated research projects on health care costs, productivity, organization, and market forces.
- To understand which characteristics of research projects are associated with effective dissemination and translation to policy.

METHODS

- Based on research and dissemination success, we selected 7 research studies (out of 149) funded by AHRQ between 1998 and 2006.
- Studies were identified by AHRQ project officers as having policy-relevant results and broad dissemination.
- We conducted semistructured interviews with principal investigators (PIs) and users of the research, along with document review.

FINDINGS

Seven AHRQ-funded studies (with PI and research institution):
- The Effect of Clinic Payment and Structure on Costs (Kralewski, University of Minnesota)
- Rural Response to Medicare+Choice: Change and Its Impact (Mueller, University of Nebraska Medical Center)
- Prescription Drug Cost-Sharing: Affordability/Safety (Hsu, Kaiser Foundation Research Institute)
- Asthma Care Quality in Varying Managed Medicaid Plans (Lieu, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care)
- Quality Measures and Managed Care Markets (Luft, University of California—San Francisco)
- Structuring Markets and Competition in Health Care (Newhouse, Harvard Medical School)
- Quality of Care for Children with Special Needs in Managed Care (Shenkman, University of Florida)

Successful dissemination and translation activities:
- All studies produced policy-relevant results regarding health care costs, productivity, and market forces.
- All studies had results published in peer-reviewed journals.
- All PIs for these studies pursued significant dissemination strategies beyond journal publication:
  - Engaged potential end users of the results in various phases of the research project—for example, to obtain and disseminate data to target audiences (e.g., Mueller, Kralewski, and Shenkman)
  - Communicated with the media following publication in prominent journals (e.g., Newhouse and Hsu)
  - Presented findings in multiple issue briefs, newsletters, and policy conferences (e.g., Hsu and Lieu)
  - Cited findings when participating in policy discussions or serving in policy advisory roles (e.g., Luft)

CONCLUSIONS

- Factors affecting dissemination:
  - Extent to which users are involved in research design and identification of research questions
  - Extent to which users and other interested parties assist with dissemination
  - Prominence of researchers and the journals in which results are published
- Examples of conceptual pathways for translating research into policy:
  - “Big bang”—in which results from a single study move research and policy in new directions (e.g., Hsu)
  - “Accumulation and diffusion”—in which research adds to an existing stream of research (e.g., Kralewski)
  - “Researcher as messenger”—in which researchers are actively involved in policy discussions, citing their research (e.g., Mueller)
  - “Researcher as user”—in which researchers take on policymaking roles (e.g., Luft)
  - “User influence or involvement”—in which users are actively involved in defining research topics (e.g., Shenkman)


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