
Developing health technology assessment capacity:

A five-step approach to disseminating the evidence

Kazanjian A, Green CJ

PRESENTED AT THE 2ND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF HEALTH SERVICES 5-8 OCTOBER, 5TH COCHRANE COLLOQUIUM 8-12 OCTOBER 1997.

BCOHTA 97:14C

**B.C. Office of Health Technology Assessment
Centre for Health Services & Policy Research
S-184 - Koerner Pavilion, 2211 Wesbrook Mall
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3**

INTRODUCTION

Regional and local expertise in producing scientifically rigorous reviews of clinical evidence is uncommon in British Columbia. In fact, almost no one outside of various departments associated with the Faculty of Medicine at the University of British Columbia contributes to, or acts as local champions of, these systematic review products.

As government departments, health institutions, and professional associations become more supportive of what has been loosely termed evidence-based medicine, they are becoming increasingly interested in scientifically rigorous reviews of clinical evidence. In addition, they are beginning to recognize the importance of having a local person who both conducts and defends these often controversial reviews.

Provincial, national, and to a growing extent international, resources and recognition have been awarded to experts who review clinical evidence. These experts, many of whom are also clinicians, undertake these reviews more or less full time, train highly skilled research staff, and often hold university appointments. Health Technology Assessment (HTA) offices such as the BC Office of Health Technology Assessment (BCOHTA) are one example of this emerging field. Although gaining academic importance, these experts are too few to meet even a fraction of the growing demands for their services and too distant to contribute to most local debates.

To influence policy and decision-making, the effective dissemination of technology assessment products is a necessary step. Like many other HTA groups, BCOHTA has been working to develop a successful dissemination strategy. The goal of the dissemination strategy is to introduce effectiveness evidence, for example, in funding or acquisition decisions, in a format which is preferred by the user of the product and is received at the most opportune time. Therefore, when a single product is being disseminated to different stakeholders, researchers need to appreciate the varying usefulness of the information they have produced to the potential users and be responsive to the specific needs of each of the stakeholders.

WHO? BCOHTA

BCOHTA is a government funded, university-based, provincial technology assessment program of research which began in 1990.

- **Purpose:** to promote and encourage the use of assessment research among decision-makers at all levels.
- **Objectives:** research, education and communication are all objectives of the Office.

BCOHTA contributes written and oral presentations to a wide range of local and national clinical-effectiveness debates. The strength of the BCOHTA method of systematic review and critical appraisal lies in the process of explicitly detailing the methodology and criteria used to produce recommendations which are based solely on the research evidence. This transparent process allows for interaction between the technology assessment expert and decision-maker

WHAT? MULTITUDE PRODUCTS & EFFECTS

An interactive approach to dissemination is optimal. BCOHTA has developed a preliminary strategy based on five key components:

1. One-on-one discussions with leaders
2. Research reports, discussion papers
3. Research publications
4. Newsletters
5. Media coverage

Critical Product vs Critical Thinking/Appraisal

The decision makers need to be engaged in the critical thinking process from the outset of the project. Their personal experiences in the research process, from framing the questions through to appraising the scientific evidence, provides a strong platform for becoming supporters and likely users of HTA.

A key factor in the success of this strategy appears to be the implementation of the dissemination strategy at specific moments in the technology acquisition/funding time frame.

It is usual to focus on the health technology assessment report as "the answer." In fact, research uptake is unlikely unless the requestor has an evidence-based approach to decision making. It can be equally important to transmit to the requestor a critical thinking approach, as well as the specific evidence pertaining to the particular question under study.

BCOHTA participates in a number of endeavors where we bring to the table not just a product but a critical approach to assessing the evidence

WHERE?

Policy context

- the clinical practice guideline panels of the CPG Council — the body responsible for guideline development in British Columbia

Program context

- a hospital society's technology assessment committee which deliberates all acquisition decisions for a group of hospitals

Practice setting

- a therapeutics initiative which establishes recommendations for appropriate drug prescription behavior

Public communication

- the science reporter of the local daily newspaper who draws extensively on BCOHTA reports

WHAT WORKS BEST?

Understanding the context of the request is instrumental for providing the most appropriate product; therefore, developing capacity for critical appraisal (and/or it's appreciation) in different health settings (policy, program, practice) is, ultimately, an effective approach to promoting HTA.

Disseminating HTA products involves, in addition to knowledge transfer, the ability to defend the findings in often contentious committee debate. Printed material falls short in this respect, yet a local expert/advocate can contribute effectively to such debates.