

VALIDATING THE FOUNDATION'S SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL – A SUMMARY

Accountability and efficiency are of great consequence in healthcare. Increasingly, the public wants to know whether the utmost in quality care is being delivered and how dollars are being spent. To meet these growing expectations, health systems policy makers and managers have committed to using health services research evidence to inform their decision-making. However, there are few tools specifically designed to assess how well organizations are able to put research into practice.

The Canadian Health Services Research Foundation developed a self-assessment tool designed to encourage decision makers to answer questions about how well their organizations are equipped to acquire, assess, adapt, and apply research evidence. The tool, *Is Research Working for You? A Self-Assessment Tool and Discussion Guide for Health Services Management and Policy Organizations*, has recently undergone a validation process. The validation findings show that for organizations wanting to evaluate their ability to use research evidence, the tool can serve as a catalyst for important discussions about using research to inform policy and management.

In their study, Anita Kothari,ⁱ Nancy Edwards,ⁱⁱ and Nadia Hamelⁱⁱ aimed to investigate whether the Foundation's self-assessment tool could be used to distinguish between organizations that have identifiable resources (people, processes and structures) for acquiring, assessing, adapting and applying research, and those that have less capacity to do so. The researchers also endeavoured to measure the tool's user-friendliness. The investigation involved 32 focus groups across four sectors of Canadian health organizations, including selected branches of federal government, long-term care organizations, non-governmental organizations, and community-based organizations. In addition to analyzing focus group transcripts, the researchers examined individual and group consensus scores from the self-assessment tool.

Key Findings:

- The self-assessment tool is generally user-friendly and useful for distinguishing between organizations that have greater capacity to use research to inform decision-making and those that have fewer resources to do so.
- The tool is especially useful in prompting discussions about evidence-informed decision-making. In fact, these discussions are arguably more helpful than the actual scores assigned, as they may generate subsequent action steps or changes within an organization. As such, the tool allows for a helpful starting place for health organizations committed to increasing their capacity to use research evidence.

- While individuals within organizations may find some value in completing the tool by themselves, this scoring is best used as a catalyst for more dynamic group discussions. In fact, both the tool and the discussions are interventions in and of themselves, calling organizations to look inwardly at their abilities to use research and to reflect on what they can do to improve their capacity.
- Given the broad scope of the tool, organizations may need more than one meeting and potentially, a facilitator, to properly consider and respond to the questions outlined in the tool. Adding this structure to the exercise ensures adequate time for discussion and assigning of consensus scores.
- Anecdotal evidence from the focus groups suggests that many organizations want to use the tool as a baseline measure of their capacity to acquire, assess, adapt, and apply research. Organizations interested in using the tool in this way are advised to carefully document their initial assessment process – that is, keep track of the approach, participants, initial scoring and group discussions – so that they may replicate this process after changes have been made.

Since the re-launch of the self-assessment tool in October 2005, the Foundation has received more than 400 requests for the tool. The web page that houses the tool has also seen significant activity; in 2008 alone (from January 1 to September 10) the page had over 600 visits. The self-assessment tool is also well-referenced in the grey and peer-reviewed literature.

To read more about the self-assessment tool, visit http://www.chsrf.ca/other_documents/working_e.php.
To request a copy, contact orglearning@chsrf.ca.

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