

Overview of the research project

Statement of the issue: In many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), continuing high rates of morbidity and mortality have brought a renewed focus to the role of research evidence in health systems policymaking. Four challenges are commonly cited by those striving to link research evidence to policy about health systems: 1) research evidence competes with many other factors in the policymaking process; 2) research evidence isn't valued enough by policymakers as an information input; 3) research evidence isn't relevant to the policy issues that policymakers face; and 4) research evidence isn't easy to use. A number of units or networks in LMICs are beginning to experiment with systematic, multi-faceted and synergistic efforts to address these challenges. Such efforts have been called knowledge-translation (KT) platforms. A research team has been asked to lead the evaluation of all 28 WHO-sponsored KT platforms that are being launched in municipalities (e.g., Beijing), countries (e.g., Mexico) and regions (e.g., east Africa) around the world.

Objectives: The project's objectives are:

1. to describe annually the activities (processes) and outputs of each KT platform, as well as the (infra)structural and contextual factors that may affect the relationships among activities, outputs and (eventually) outcomes and impact and select usage statistics;
2. to conduct formative evaluations of the priority-setting processes, packaged evidence summaries and deliberative dialogues organized by each KT platform in year 1;
3. to conduct outcome evaluations of each KT platform at baseline (for comparative purposes) and in years 2 and 4 with a focus on the platforms' anticipated outcomes: namely that health research evidence about high-priority policy issues is made available, relationships among policymakers, researchers and KT specialists are developed or strengthened, and policymakers' capacity to support the use of health research evidence in health systems policymaking is strengthened; and
4. to conduct impact evaluations of a purposive sample of KT platforms in years 3 and 4 with a focus on the KT platforms' anticipated impact: namely that health systems policymaking processes take into account health research evidence.

Design and methods: To address these objectives the research team plans:

- **each year** to combine a survey of the KT platforms, a review of their usage statistics, reports and work plans, and a bibliographic database analysis and to collaborate with each local team to conduct a focus group to seek input on the meanings and implications of the findings;
- **in year 1** to collaborate with each local team to survey participants in each KT platform's priority-setting process and deliberative dialogues and recipients of its packaged evidence summaries;
- **at baseline and in years 2 and 4** to collaborate with each local team to combine a survey of policymakers, stakeholders and researchers and a media analysis and to conduct two focus groups to seek input on the meanings and implications of the findings; and
- **in year 3** to collaborate with four local teams **and in year 4** to collaborate with another four local teams to conduct a total of eight case studies of health systems policymaking processes (using both interviews and documentary analyses).

In order to derive overarching conclusions from our project, the research team plans to use a constant comparative method to develop a theoretical framework that identifies relationships among (infra)structural and contextual factors, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact, both within and across jurisdictions.

Deliverables: The research team will produce three types of knowledge products: 1) papers based on the annual KT platform descriptions, formative evaluations (one for each of the three types), outcome evaluations (one for years 0-2 and another for years 2-4), impact evaluations, and theoretical framework; 2) plain-language summaries of the papers; and 3) a "how to" guide for evaluating KT platforms. The research team will develop an active knowledge-translation plan.