

Factors Associated with Use of Management Research in Health Systems

Anthony R. Kovner, Ph.D.
Professor, Health Policy and management
New York University
295 Lafayette Ave, #3008
New York , NY, 10012
Phone: (212) 998-7444
Electronic Mail: anthony.kovner@nyu.edu

Executive Summary

This research was designed to identify and explore factors associated with knowledge transfer between researchers and managers in health systems participating in the Center for Health Management Research. The research focused on four topics or areas: (1) the choice of indicators used to identify successful implementation of diabetes management programs; (2) the relationship between budgeting procedures and organizational strategic priorities, (3) the design of managerial dashboards, and (4) the adaptation of compensation systems for managers of physicians to improve physician performance. It combined interviews with literature review. In total, we conducted over 75 interviews with managers and experts for this study.

Overview of Project Findings and Implications for Senior Leadership and Managers

Part A: Knowledge Transfer

- 1 Evidence. All management decisions are based on evidence. The question for managers becomes improving the benefit/cost of the evidentiary process. The question for the organization becomes: lowering the cost of obtaining the evidence and increasing the capacity of managers to evaluate evidence.
- 2 Search. Management search for evidence is limited by time available, competing priorities, difficulties in obtaining relevant evidence and translating evidence so that it can be easily used and adapted by managers.
- 3 Research. Most managers do not read the research literature and have not been trained to evaluate evidence. Researchers are not generally incented to provide managers with valid answers to the questions managers seek to answer.
- 4 Access. Managers get most of their evidence from consultants, peer groups, professional meetings, and networking with colleagues, particularly in their own systems.
- 5 Internal Studies. Managers also conduct their own studies, focus groups and market assessments.

Part B: Access to Management Research

- 6 External Organizations. External organizations, such as CMS and JCAHO provide managers with evidence-based guidelines, upon some of which payment for performance is mad
- 7 Specialists. Health systems are hiring specialists, including librarians, to help search for data. This is part of the job for many clinician managers.
- 8 Decision-making. Health systems devote little attention to reflecting upon and improving decision making processes. For example, few if any studies review the assumptions upon which strategic interventions were made, and the processes involved in specifying these assumptions.

- 9 Useful research. There are some useful research studies “out there,” which health systems would wish to take advantage of, if they were suitably translated for managerial use.

Part C: Funding of Management Research

- 10 Funding. Health systems do not place a high priority on funding for management research
- 11 Disconnect. Researchers do not place a high priority on answering the questions of managers in ways easily understandable to managers.
- 12 Lack of legitimacy. There is a lack of status and legitimacy for management research in academic medical centers and in the Institutes of Health, and in large health systems and associations of smaller healthcare organizations.
- 13 Evidence-based management. Making decisions based on evidence is highly valued, across the study organizations. How this is translated into actionable behavior, given shortages of time and competing priorities, remains to be seen.

Part D: Findings in the Four Topic Areas

- 14 Diabetes Management. This is an area in which there are considerable and detailed guidelines set by external groups. A barrier to improving diabetes management, given that this is a chronic disease, and given the lack of data on what leads to patient adherence, are the organization of services largely for acute rather than chronic care, largely due to financial reimbursement for care.
- 15 Budgeting and Strategic Priorities. Those interviewed felt there was a close relationship between budgeting processes and strategic priorities. This was related to the specificity and duration of strategic planning. A research priority that emerged was the need to study the benefit/cost of the budgeting process with a view to spending less managerial time on this.
- 16 Managerial Dashboards. All have organizations have organizational dashboards. There seemed to be little reflection on priorities among the indicators, and regarding the processes by which indicators are set and changed, and targets or benchmarks chosen.
- 17 Compensating Managers Responsible for Physician Performance. There was a lack of experimentation by health systems in this area which seems unexpected given the importance of the topic, and given much greater experimentation in paying the physicians themselves as related to performance.

Part E: Practical Strategies

- 18 Start small while thinking big. Examine ways to increase the benefit/cost of current investments and partnerships.
- 19 Examine current interventions for the evidence upon which they were based.
- 20 Investigate partnership options and funding opportunities.
- 21 Develop a priority list of management research opportunities and consider how these may be funded.
- 22 Assign responsibility for knowledge management. Who is responsible for assessing evidence currently available within the organization and evidence that should be available to managers in the organization, and for making that evidence available to potential users.
- 23 Consider rewarding managers for obtaining and using evidence and for testing interventions to learn afterwards the reasons for success and failure.
- 24 Fund evidence-based management increasingly out of the capital budget. Develop metrics for benefits and costs of better knowledge management.
- 25 Invest in management research. Pilot investments of at least \$500,000 annually (for each \$1 billion of sales).

Business Applications of this research are included above under practical strategies.