

Understanding Implementation Research: Case study from the HIFA virtual discussion forum



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Background :

Healthcare information for All (HIFA) is a global initiative of more than 17,000 individuals in 175 countries. Under a new program called 'Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice', themed discussions are being conducted in the HIFA virtual forum. The results of the second themed discussion on "Implementation Research(IR) - engaging everyone, not just scientists" held in 2016 for a period of six weeks is being presented.

Methodology:

The HIFA moderator introduced the topic in the first week. Every week a set of question was sent to the forum for discussion. A thematic analysis was conducted on the 100 substantial contributions received.

Results:

Theme 1: There is confusion about IR, particularly in relation to similar approaches like quality improvement, operational research, knowledge translation and health-services research.

"Like the proverbial 7 blind men attempting to describe an elephant, a universal definition of IR appears elusive!"
- Global Health Professional, Switzerland

"I may not have heard of implementation research but think implementation research should similar to operational research."
- Global Health Professional, Afghanistan

"I consider a full understanding of IR as a necessary prerequisite for successful implementation of research outcomes, and for people like me already in QI, the understanding of the shared boundaries and differences further consolidate on that."
- Medical Doctor, Nigeria

"My question: is there a difference, similarity between IR and TR (Translational Research)? – Academic , Nigeria

"I have been puzzling over what the difference is between IR and Participatory Action Research(PAR) or Participatory Action Learning(PAL)."- Academic, UK

Theme 2: IR provides an opportunity to better understand the health system and policy perspective.

"IR is demand driven and research questions are framed based on needs identified together with relevant stakeholders / implementers in the health system (or policy makers)."- Global Health Professional, Pakistan

Theme 3: Difficulty in locating implementation research articles for policy making, program planning and research is a challenge.

"There are thousands of papers 'out there' that could be described as 'Implementation Research', and yet may not be easy to identify as such."- Global Health Professional, UK

"PubMed does not have 'implementation research' in its phrase index...I see nothing adds sensitivity and specificity to a search on this topic, and (there is) no consistency..."- Medical Librarian, USA

Conclusion and Considerations:

1. The **proliferation of multiple terminologies based on epistemological and ontological variations are confusing for not only frontline health workers but also for those in the academia.** This confusion may be limiting academic, political and financial commitment to IR and needs to be addressed as a priority.
2. Global health workers have a positive outlook about IR and there is a demand to learn and understand about IR . It **is seen as an essential step towards implementation of research evidence in the real world.**
3. Locating IR resources and articles is a major challenge on account of major indexing databases like PubMed not having indexing terms for it. This is compounded by the proliferation of multiple terminologies. **Indexing agencies should consider retrospective indexing of IR to facilitate easy retrieval of IR articles and resources.**

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