

Efficiency Research Fellowships give a human face to implementation

Once the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a new intervention have been demonstrated, all that remains is the small matter of its implementation. Yet this can take a very long time, even when the benefits of rapid introduction seem clear enough. Why should this be so? Could there still be varying professional ideas about the value of the intervention, despite the evidence? Are there organizational, logistical or cultural reasons for this delay? And which implementation strategies can be deployed effectively?

Building up knowledge

Healthcare innovations often require active implementation and, in some cases, further attention at a later stage. Implementation is a field in its own right. It is a multi-disciplinary research area with sociological, psychological and financial aspects. The implementation subprogramme of ZonMw's Efficiency Research focuses on gaining insight into the implementation of healthcare innovations that have proven to be efficient (new standard, new method, new intervention), thereby encouraging the use of relevant results of scientific research for the purpose of efficient healthcare.

As a part of this process, implementation fellowships are an important instrument. Implementation fellows advise clinicians and researchers within their own institutions on implementation and implementation research. As well as a knowledge boost, the fellowship also provides an incentive to the implementation knowledge infrastructure within both the academic and the non-academic centres and their regions. The fellows stimulate research in the implementation of efficient interventions by initiating research proposals and advising on them. One implementation fellow is represented at each of the eight university hospitals, and at two further hospitals that offer highly specialized clinical care. Here they give a human face to implementation.

What kind of research is eligible for financing?

Research proposals for the Implementation subprogramme should focus on a real implementation issue. At this point, the efficiency of the intervention must have already been demonstrated. In order to ascertain which factors influence the new intervention and determine the size of the issue, a problem analysis must be proposed. This could be followed by a study into the effectiveness of various implementation strategies. This, in turn, could lead to a study into the effectiveness of concrete implementation of the intervention, possibly linked to a study of cost-effectiveness. It is important that results of these studies can be generalized.

The implementation fellow

"Researchers don't always sense ZonMw's objective for the Implementation research framework," says Astrid Goossens, implementation fellow in the Quality and Process Innovation department of the Academic Medical Center in Amsterdam, where she also works as a programme manager and implementation consultant. "In its programme brochure, ZonMw mentions comparing implementation strategies. What is the effect

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Good, high-quality care against acceptable costs. This is what the ZonMw Efficiency Research programme represents. It provides insight into the cost-effectiveness of interventions and ensures that results find their way into practice. The programme consists of three subprogrammes, each aimed at a specific type of research question: Early Evaluation of Medical Innovation, Effects & Costs and Implementation.

For more information, visit www.zonmw.nl/do.

ZonMw

ZonMw works on the improvement of prevention, care and health by stimulating and financing research, development and implementation.

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of sending a reminder, the effect of continuing professional education, of employing an opinion leader? ZonMw wants to get a clear picture of the importance of such generic elements, so that they can be incorporated into the custom fit implementation is always designed to be. Professionals prefer to implement the new approach nationwide as quickly as possible. I help them fine-tune their proposals to ZonMw's requirements.'

Translating research questions

Implementation fellows are appointed for a period of three years. In spring 2009, the first four implementation fellows started at various university hospitals. In their first year, they follow joint monthly training sessions provided by IQ Healthcare in Nijmegen. Goossens learns a lot from interacting with her teachers, "especially regarding practical issues that are important when it comes to translating research questions into grant applications. For example, what is the best way to set up a grant application for an implementation study?" In the second and third years, this knowledge will only deepen, while IQ Healthcare guides the fellows individually in writing grant applications for the Implementation subprogramme. An important requisite is that the fellows take part in at least two grant applications a year within the Implementation subprogramme. That aside, Goossens actually contributes to implementation projects in practice. She is currently involved in a large project that aims to realize better medication reconciliation at the time of admission and discharge.

Setting up knowledge networks

It is important that implementation fellows set up networks in their own hospitals, so that acquired knowledge can be spread. "How this is achieved varies according to each hospital. Professionals who want to implement a new method often approach us on their own accord, for example, an intensive care physician who asks for assistance in implementing an infection prevention protocol." In such a scenario, Goossens helps the physician's along with the grant application already in the back of her mind. The fellowship gives implementation a personal, approachable face. "Recently, I was invited to join the internal committee that deals with the initial review of all grant applications. Researchers often ask me to reassess rejected grant applications and, increasingly, I'm asked to contribute to education and courses."

All this contributes towards a sea change. Professionals realize, more and more, that the results of their studies need to be implemented well. "They used to think it would suffice to give a quick talk and leave a memo in the pigeon holes of colleagues. That time really is behind us now."



The implementation fellows

More information

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