



UNDP/UNFPA/WHO/WORLD BANK
Special Programme of Research, Development and
Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP)

Knowledge synthesis and transfer: a case-study



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Executive summary

This case-study on knowledge synthesis and transfer at HRP focuses primarily on *The WHO Reproductive Health Library* (RHL) and HRP's associated work on systematic reviews. The Programme does not have a working definition of the term 'knowledge synthesis and transfer'. For this case-study, 'knowledge synthesis' was defined as the sifting and combining of evidence derived from research to guide clinical decision-making and to assist in the formulation of health policies; 'knowledge transfer' was defined as the dissemination and implementation of that evidence. The terms of reference were to evaluate the systematic reviews, RHL, dossiers for addition of medications to the *WHO List of Essential Medicines*, summaries of evidence for consensus statements and evidence-based guidance.

Methods

Interviews were held with relevant HRP staff and contributors and users of the products of the Programme. The feedback was used to write the sections on inputs and outcomes and the recommendations. Additional information on HRP's activities was collected by document review and from the Programme's web site.

Findings

Inputs

The human resources for all the knowledge synthesis activities, including RHL and the systematic reviews, are one full-time staff member and a full-time administrator. As knowledge synthesis and transfer is a transversal activity of the Department of Reproductive Health and Research (RHR)¹, most of the other Programme

staff are also involved in these activities.

Quantifying the human resource input is therefore difficult.

Between 2002 and 2007, a total of US\$ 756 931 was spent by HRP on knowledge synthesis. Parallel funding has been provided from partnerships and networks with collaborative groups and nongovernmental agencies.

The main outputs are:

- systematic reviews on practice and interventions in sexual and reproductive health service delivery, which are the building blocks of RHL and other evidence-based guidance from HRP/RHR;
- annual production of RHL, an electronic compilation of best practices in sexual and reproductive health and other information relevant to the management of related services. RHL is published in five languages;
- summaries of evidence and guidelines based on systematic reviews, e.g. applications for inclusion in the *WHO Model List of Essential Medicines*;
- consensus statements on matters of concern to Member States;
- capacity-building through workshops and local support; and
- other outputs, to which HRP contributed, including *Medical eligibility criteria for contraceptive use*, the Implementing Best Practices Knowledge Gateway, policy briefs, provider briefs, fact sheets, the HRP newsletter *Progress* and presentations at scientific meetings.



1. The Department of Reproductive Health and Research (RHR) includes HRP and a component concerned with programmatic work in sexual and reproductive health.



Collaborative arrangements

Partnerships have been established with regional collaborating centres (RHL focal points), predominantly in low- and middle-income countries, to assist with the production of systematic reviews and implementation of RHL. The preparation of systematic reviews is supported by a special collaborative arrangement with the Cochrane Collaboration, an international organization committed to producing high-quality systematic reviews. This arrangement allows publication of full Cochrane reviews in RHL.

Cost-effectiveness

The cost of preparing systematic reviews at HRP is very low, less than US\$ 20 000 per review, which is comparable to that of producing Cochrane reviews. Much of the work of the experts is voluntary.

Outcomes and global public goods

HRP's work on knowledge synthesis and transfer is used as the basis for guidelines and policy changes, within RHR, by professional medical societies and at global, regional and country levels. Other goods produced by HRP are new or improved technologies, new research questions, global

Conclusions

Successes and strengths

- The outputs are growing progressively, with a varied range of products and demonstrated effects on evidence-based clinical and policy decisions.
- HRP has the ability to convene large numbers of individuals and organizations, which is an important factor in the cost-effectiveness of the work on knowledge synthesis and transfer.
- The work addresses globally important issues in sexual and reproductive health and is of relevance to low- and middle-income countries.
- The staff at WHO includes experienced, competent researchers who can manage systematic reviews.
- In response to the recommendations of the previous external evaluation, HRP works increasingly by electronic means to improve dissemination. Implementation of the planned dissemination strategies results in efficient use of knowledge products, as demonstrated for *The Lancet Series on Sexual and Reproductive Health and RHL*.

Weaknesses

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