The Organisational Benefits of a Strong Research Culture in a Health Service

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Background

Organisations with a "research culture" value evidence, encourage participation in research activities, provide opportunities for staff to acquire research skills, recognise research achievements, and invest resources in research activity. Investment and participation in research activities are known to increase outputs (such as publications and grant funding) and deliver value for money. **But does a research culture improve organisational performance?**

Methods

A systematic literature review was conducted to determine whether an association exists between elements indicative of a research culture and better organisational performance.

- **Databases were searched** combining the key concepts of **research culture** (research investment, participating, training) and **organisational performance** (clinical outcomes, efficiency, productivity, staff satisfaction).
- **Inclusion criteria were applied** to titles, abstracts and then to full text by two reviewers
- **Articles assessed for quality** using the MERSQI
- **Extraction of data and descriptive synthesis** of results.

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Findings & Discussion

Of 3015 studies identified**, 8 met criteria for inclusion in the review**. Three studies evaluated the effect of interventions targeting individual health professionals on organisation wide indicators. The other 5 studies were retrospective cross-sectional designs, comparing the performance of health services with high levels of research engagement with those that did not. **All studies reported a positive association between research activity and organisational performance in at least one of five domains measured.**

However, these **positive associations do not demonstrate causal relationships**. Other factors, such as excellence in leadership, resource availability and attractiveness of an organisation to quality staff, are also likely to influence both research culture and organisational performance.

The **relatively small body of literature** available addressing 'outcomes' rather than 'outputs' of research investment leaves many unanswered questions for health service managers and policy makers. These unresolved questions make interpretation of the current findings difficult for managers and policy makers and represent a potential focus for future research.

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