

COMMENTARY

Implementation research in Primary Care (Part 1): What is implementation research?

Chor Yau Ooi¹, PhD ; Wen Ting Tong², PhD ; Anne Sales³, PhD ; Chirk Jenn Ng^{2,4,5}, PhD 

¹ Department of Family Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Jalan Datuk Mohammad Musa, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

² Department of Primary Care Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

³ Sinclair School of Nursing and Department of Family and Community Medicine, MU School of Medicine, University of Missouri, Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211, USA.

⁴ Department of Research, SingHealth Polyclinics, Singapore.

⁵ Centre for Population Health Research and Implementation, SingHealth Regional Health System, Hospital Boulevard, #19-01 SingHealth Tower, Singapore.

Keywords:

Implementation science, Primary health care, Translational research, Internet-based intervention, Shared decision making

Corresponding Author:

Chirk Jenn Ng

Department of Primary Care Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Department of Research, SingHealth Polyclinics, Singapore.

Centre for Population Health Research and Implementation, SingHealth Regional Health System, Hospital Boulevard, #19-01 SingHealth Tower, Singapore.

Email: ng.chirk.jenn@singhealth.com.sg

Abstract

Implementation research plays a vital role in narrowing the “evidence-to-practice” gap in primary care by ensuring that evidence-based interventions are not only adopted but also embedded into routine clinical practice in a sustainable way. This is especially important in primary care, where clinicians care for diverse patient groups, work within evolving healthcare systems, and face rapid technological change. Implementation research is defined as “*the scientific study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice, thereby improving the quality and effectiveness of health services.*” This commentary introduces the concept and significance of implementation research, outlines its place within the broader research translation continuum, and clarifies how it differs from quality improvement. It also provides examples of how implementation research is applied in primary care to support the adoption of new innovations. should be further verified.

Why implementation research?

Despite groundbreaking advances in biomedical research, it takes 17 years for only 14% of research findings to impact patient care.¹ This delay costs billions,² and undermines healthcare outcomes; only 60% of persons in healthcare settings receive care according to evidence-based guidelines.³ There are various reasons why it is difficult to move an evidence-based intervention from a clinical research environment to the real-world health services. In the research world, evidence-based innovations are often implemented under controlled conditions to maximise its efficacy whereby participants were carefully selected, and specialized and trained researchers were the ones who conduct the implementation and evaluation, and all these are supported by research funds. But in the real-world health services practice, the intention for implementation is to achieve sustainable delivery and widespread adoption without selecting the target population. Also, implementers are usually clinicians with no specialized training on the implementation, and there is often limited funds to deliver these services. The issues highlighted above have prompted healthcare funders, policymakers and researchers to act. Hence, the emergence of the field implementation research, which aims to close the research-practice gap. Implementation research directly tackles implementation barriers by identifying obstacles and designing strategies to ensure the sustainable adoption of proven interventions.

The Role of Implementation Research in Primary Care

Implementation research is essential for bridging the “evidence-to-practice” gap in primary care,