

Capturing Research Impact

High quality research is vital to underpin practice of Allied Health Professionals in Health and Social Care. Equally important is to capture the impact that any such research has had.

Research Impact can be defined simply as an effect, an influence, a significant change or benefit to health, quality of life, society, policy, services, the environment and the economy. This leaflet provides handy top ten tips to help you plan for and capture Research Impact.

Tip 1 – Possible beneficiaries

Think widely about who might possibly benefit from your research activities and your research findings. It could be patients, members of the public, carers, professional colleagues, your department, other health professions, health and social care services, management, professional and statutory bodies, and other researchers in your field. Having these thoughts will help you to plan for capturing impact as the research progresses.

Tip 2 - Formulate a steering group

All research projects benefit from having a steering group and it is useful to have a group who can think in depth about the research progress, research quality and the possible impacts of your research activities from day one. Ensure you include relevant members who can represent all possible beneficiaries.

Tip 3 - Planning for Impact

When planning your research, consider what the possible impacts your research might have locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Also consider on whom the research may impact and identify which impacts short or long are of a priority to capture. These thoughts may vary as you proceed through the research project and may expand also as the project ends.

Tip 4 - Capturing and measuring impact

Decide early on what impact your research, the research findings, and the dissemination of your research findings, might have on who or what, and think how you might capture

and measure this impact e.g. through interviews, questionnaires, observation, changes in policy, economic evaluation, service evaluation, service audits, outcome measurement. Be ready to capture and measure impact as it happens throughout your research process and beyond.

Tip 5 – Consider participation impact

Depending on the type of research being undertaken participants in the research project often indicate that they have benefited from wider aspects of the research process, for example, in qualitative studies which include focus groups, participants will often say that they feel that they have benefited from having the opportunity to discuss certain issues with others in a safe environment. So involvement in research alone can have benefits which in itself is a potential impact.

Tip 6 - Corroborators of impact content

Develop a list as the research progresses of key individuals who would be able to corroborate the impact the research has had on them. These key individuals will be important for you to contact during the project, at the final stages of the project and on an ongoing basis. As impact is not necessarily an immediate factor.

Tip 7 - Reflecting on impact

Whilst your research is taking place keep reflecting on possible impact developments capture impacts as they occur if it all possible and discuss these with your stakeholder group. For example, some clinical research activities may at an early stage lead to changes in service delivery at a local level. Capture this and monitor it as it progresses.

Tip 8 - Discuss findings

Once your research is completed meet with the steering group and potential beneficiaries to have in-depth discussions about any obvious and immediate impacts of the research and make plans as to how to capture and measure the impact on a regular basis via reports, questionnaires, interviews, further data collection, etc.

Tip 9 – Disseminate findings

Disseminate the findings of your research via academic, lay and professional journals, writing at different levels for different audiences and also disseminate your findings via conference presentations. This alone is not impact but dissemination of your findings can lead to impact in itself e.g. by individuals who read your work, implementing your findings. Look carefully at who has cited your work and note what influence your work has had on theirs.

Tip 10 - Building on Impact

Impact of research can take some time to occur and in some cases impacts can continually expand and grow over a considerable amount time, e.g. 20 years. It is useful therefore to keep in touch with your corroborators, and those who have implemented your research findings and ascertain what the ongoing impact of this research contribution has been for them.

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