

Consultation Workshop on Development of Networks to Support Health Decision-Making and Health Policy Formulation in Low and Lower Middle Income Countries

**World Health Organization (WHO)
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, June 13-15, 2005**

Executive Summary Report

Background: This meeting marked the pilot launch of a call for networks to support health decision-making and health policy formulation.¹ The call was designed in response to one of the resolutions from the WHO Ministerial Summit on Health Research (Nov. 2004), which was subsequently endorsed at the World Health Assembly (May 2005). The resolution called for establishing or strengthening mechanisms to transfer knowledge in support of evidence-based public health and health care delivery systems and evidence-based health-related policies. Countries from WHO's Western Pacific Region were invited to submit applications for the first phase of this two-phase process: Phase 1), the planning stage which requires a letter of intent (LOI) - applicant teams submitted draft LOIs in advance of this workshop meeting; and Phase 2), the implementation phase which will require a more detailed application due in June, 2006.

Purpose: To prepare applicants for the LOI opportunity and specifically to discuss expectations, ideas and strategies for the planning and implementation phase of the networks; and also to discuss how the networks can learn from and communicate with each other during this process.

Sponsors/Organizers:

WHO Headquarters (Research Policy and Cooperation Department), WHO Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO), WHO Representative Office in Malaysia, Ministry of Health Malaysia, Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, Canadian Health Services Research Foundation, Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Institute of Population and Public Health, and CIHR Institute of Health Services and Policy Research.

Participant List:

Applicants: There were 7 teams with most teams having 3 members in attendance. The countries represented were Laos, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and China (Beijing municipality, Shandong and Sichuan provinces).

¹ See

http://www.who.int/rpc/summit/documents/Proposed_WHO_Networks_to_Support_Health_Decision-Making.pdf for the full report on the Networks concept

Funders: Representatives from the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, Canadian Health Services Research Foundation and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research

WHO Temporary Advisors/Resource Persons

Meeting Observers from Brunei and Malaysia

Secretariat from the Institute for Health Systems Research, Ministry of Health Malaysia

The complete participant list is included in Appendix 1

Overview of Meeting:

It was a successful 3-day meeting achieving the organizer's primary objectives of receiving draft LOIs from country or provincial/regional teams, sharing experiences from initiatives in other parts of the world and setting the stage for the next step forward. The overriding principle guiding the conduct of the consultative workshop was to share and learn from each other. Thus the workshop was designed with presentations from WPRO countries, provinces and regions and resource persons.

The first day of the meeting included presentations from teams on past experiences with research-to-policy initiatives. This was followed by an overview of complementary initiatives from East Africa, Europe, and the Western Pacific. The second day was focused on the LOIs with teams presenting their initial plans for the planning phase. The focus of the afternoon was on the role of conducting and accessing systematic reviews as an important function of the proposed networks. The third day was primarily focused on teams refining their LOIs based on the information and feedback from the first two days. Significant enhancements were made to the LOIs.

Key points and lessons for each day were summarized and presented by resource persons. In addition, at the end of each day, resource persons met to discuss the day's events with the objective of improving and enhancing the workshop for the following day.

The meeting concluded with a discussion of next steps in preparing and evaluating the LOIs, and possible communication methods with WHO and among teams over the coming year.

A compact disc containing all the presentations is available for more detailed information.

Summary of Meeting Proceedings

Day 1

Key messages from opening remarks from Tikki Pang (WHO Headquarters), Soe Nyunt-U (Western Pacific Regional Office – WPRO), Maimunah Hamid (Institute for Health Systems Research, Ministry of Health Malaysia):

The organization of this workshop was a direct follow-up to the Mexico Summit and World Health Assembly's resolution to establish mechanisms to transfer knowledge in support of evidence-based healthcare. The launch of the networks initiative is an experiment in itself in that WHO intends to evaluate the process, outcomes and impact and to learn from countries about the possible solutions to decreasing the gap between what we know and what we do. WPRO is committed to facilitating the integration of this initiative at the country level and pledges to continue the consultative process and to strengthen collaboration between and among countries in WPRO. The purpose of the workshop was stated, namely to share ideas, strategies and lessons from the countries, provinces and regions and resource persons in the use of evidence for health decision-making and policy formulation. It was hoped that the new knowledge gained throughout the workshop will assist countries to further develop their LOIs.

Day 1 Team Presentations

Each team presented on their experiences, both successful and unsuccessful, in applying research findings to policy-making. Abu Bakar Suleiman made the following concluding remarks following the presentations:

- Policy-making can be very complex
- There needs to be a flexibility of approach depending on the context, views of influential groups (such as religious groups in Malaysia), socio-cultural issues (e.g. barriers to vaccination that will affect program effectiveness) and issues of human rights
- Pushing for funds for health systems research vs. biomedical research is often difficult
- Availability of and access to high quality and timely data is key
- The need to put a proposal within the context of the country's health system's vision, mission and values is important
- It is necessary to obtain buy-in from policy and other decision-makers. This can take place during the priority-setting phase and reinforced during subsequent interactions
- Evaluation of efforts should be built into the entire process
- The need for research to be internalized into the health care system and into management decision-making is the ultimate goal

Sharing of Experiences by Resource Persons

International experiences of what does and does not work using evidence in decision-making were shared including a new initiative in the East African region. Issues raised by presenters and team participants include:

- Identifying the “actors” involved in the push, pull and exchange processes of translating research knowledge into policy is important
- Presence of huge amounts of grey (unpublished) literature and in languages other than English limits accessibility
- Sustainability and ownership are challenging
- Many problems can be solved by taking a systems approach vs. a disease management strategy
- There are strong synergistic effects from doing many things a little bit better
- A minimum of a modest increase in funding is essential
- A long term implementation timeframe is key
- Regular engagement of policy-makers through formal and informal methods is very helpful

Resource person presenters included Don DeSavigny and Nelson Sewankambo on the East Africa REACH program (Dr. DeSavigny also gave an overview of the WHO Health Metrics Network and the INDEPTH Network), Ulysses Panisset on WHO Headquarter initiatives such as the Knowledge Management and Sharing Department, and Reijo Salmela on integration of various initiatives to support evidence-based policy and decision-making at the country level.

Don DeSavigny summarized the day by identifying strategies that worked. In addition to the above points he noted the importance of the following factors:

- Researchers whose work can inform policy need to continue to be involved in the scaling up of activities during policy implementation
- Win-win strategic alliances need to be developed between researchers and policy-makers
- Continuous dialogue and communication is vital
- Research results need to be simplified and packaged appropriately to enhance usability
- Integration of new interventions into existing platforms is an efficient implementation strategy
- Choosing a hot topic for government audiences will promote engagement
- Convincing, accurate evidence is key

He also stressed that it is important to learn from what doesn't work:

- Lack of an appropriate research agenda, donor support, and decision-maker support
- Lack of timely data for priority-setting processes
- Lack of research quality assurance
- Poor communications
- Poor packaging and marketing
- Weak health systems research and capacity
- Poor understanding of the value of research
- Little access to information
- Evidence that is distorted

Day 2

The second day started with an overview of the Networks concept followed by teams presenting their LOIs with emphasis on identifying their major challenges. John Lavis provided an overview of his reaction to the presentations of team draft LOIs. He based his comments on the following themes:

- Focus (target audiences, catchment area, content)
- Nature of partnerships and integration plans
- Activities
 - Exchange initiatives (priority setting and interactive forums)
 - Initiatives to facilitate user-pull efforts (one-stop shopping, rapid response function, and capacity development)
 - Producer-push initiatives
 - Research identification and production

In the second part of the day presentations focused on the importance of systematic reviews as a key function of the proposed networks. Resource persons gave overviews of existing initiatives that may provide useful models or partnership opportunities. Parminder Raina presented on the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's Evidence-Based Practice Centres' approach to conducting systematic reviews and their role in decision-making processes. Tikki Pang presented on behalf of Jane Wallace from the WHO EURO Health Evidence Network (HEN). John Lavis concluded this session by discussing some of the available options and corresponding shortcomings with respect to accessing existing systematic reviews, accessing technical expertise in conducting (and regularly updating) systematic reviews, and assessing the quality and local applicability of systematic reviews.

Day 3

On the last day of the meeting teams worked on refining their LOIs based on the discussions and feedback from the first two days. They then presented their changes or modifications which addressed:

- Exchange initiatives to ensure responsiveness to emerging priorities especially regular interactive forums
- Initiatives to support user pull efforts especially a rapid response function
- Producer push initiatives especially packaging research
- Research identification especially accessing systematic reviews
- Relative emphasis on core functions/objectives as the teams scale up their work over the 5 year period
- Identification of realistic outcomes to be achieved both individually and collectively

Communication Strategies

The group discussed ways that teams can interact and share information over the next few months. WHO has made available a website dedicated to the networks, which is password protected. All teams will have access to the website and are encouraged to share reports or other information that may be beneficial to the group (e.g., upcoming courses or meetings). The use of the site will further the momentum and energy for this initiative. It was also suggested that teams could share their next version of their LOIs with other teams for information and feedback.

Next Steps

A variety of items were discussed including developing an evaluation protocol for the entire initiative, where teams could be involved in its development, and having a generic power point presentation on the networks initiative so that teams can share the information with others.

With respect to the LOI, the deadline has been moved forward to August 15, 2005, 1600 hrs Geneva time. LOIs can be sent electronically, followed by the formal hard copy submission by mail. The change in the deadline will be communicated by WPRO to each Ministry of Health. LOIs must not exceed 5 pages. Any additional relevant materials may be included as appendices.

Naming of the Initiative

The group brainstormed some possible names for the Networks initiative. They included:

- HEN – health evidence network - However it was noted that another initiative from WHO EURO already uses this acronym
- Health Decide Asia
- R2P – research to policy
- EviNet – evidence network
- NeSHed – network to support health decision-making

- NGMS – narrow the gap, maximize the sharing
- Health Evidence Exchange Network
- HEAT – health evidence and transfer network
- CHANGE – collaborative health action network that generates evidence
- Bridging research and policy
- Research – policy connect (RPC)
- Research Policy Bridge
- BRIDGE
- Know-Do Bridge

Countries were encouraged to submit other possible names for consideration and a selection process will be undertaken to determine the name that will be chosen.

Closing Comments

The meeting concluded with closing comments from Reijo Salmela, Maimunah Hamid and Tikki Pang who thanked the teams for their hard work before and during the meeting, as well as the resource persons for their time and talent, the sponsors for their generous support, and the Institute for Health Systems Research staff for their excellent work in organizing the meeting and their hospitality.

APPENDIX 1



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Consultative Workshop on Development of Networks to Support Health Decision- Making and Policy Formulation

13 – 15 June 2005
Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

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