

Increasing allied health research output – leading a strategy

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Summary

Allied health research productivity at a metropolitan hospital has increased considerably over the past eight years through the leadership, establishment and implementation of a strategy to grow clinician and organisational research capacity.

Background

Conducting and translating research is necessary to improve the quality of patient care, and to provide efficient and cost effective allied health interventions. An enhanced research culture in allied health hospital departments can also contribute to improved staff satisfaction and retention.

Methods

An allied health research plan was developed for 2008 to 2011 at a Melbourne metropolitan health service, with the primary objective of increasing research activity via: competitive fellowships to provide protected research time; increasing clinician research skills and confidence; providing pathways into research higher degrees; and enhancing relationships with universities and research institutes, including joint appointments.

The second phase of the strategy from 2012 to 2015 was more focussed on aligning with the organisational model of developing an academic health research translation centre to build and strengthen pillars of research excellence, and to be more competitive in the selected research fields. Resources were targeted to prioritise studies within the research pillars, as well as dose response research that has the potential to demonstrate the value add of allied health.

Results

From 2007 to 2014, allied health publications in peer reviewed journals increased from 17 to 87 per year, whilst grant funding increased 15 fold (and 30 fold for 2011). Conference presentations increased from 13 to 112 per year, and staff undertaking higher research degrees increased from 22 to 55.

Discussion

A strong research culture is present in allied health at this health service, although it is still in the early stages of development relative to medical partners. More work is required to further increase research outputs and competitiveness, develop sustainable funding streams, and to determine whether there are ongoing improved patient outcomes as a result of improved research culture.