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Evidence Reconsidered for Health System Guidance



JASP - Quebec City, 19 November 2008
Susan Law, VP Research and Evaluation – CHSRF
[on behalf of the 'What is evidence team']

Some not-very-straightforward answers

1. Evidence is not absolute and what it means is not a given.
2. You can define it, but your definition will not be applicable, nor necessarily useful, to all evidence-based practices.
3. It is important to distinguish scientific from non-scientific forms of evidence.
4. It is important to distinguish evidence from non-evidence.
5. Better than the question "What is evidence?" is the question "What is the most appropriate information for accomplishing a given objective?"

May 31, 2005

Conceptualizing and Combining Evidence for Health-System Guidance

Jonathan Lomas, Anthony Culyer, Chris McCutcheon, Laura McAuley, Susan Law

Sept. 29, 2005

Weighing Up the Evidence

Workshop of leaders of organizations that offer guidance to health systems (e.g., CCOHTA; AETMIS; NICE; ZonMW; US and Can. evidence-based practice centres; health quality councils)

Background

A commitment was made in the September 2004 First Ministers' 10-year plan for health care to establish "evidence-based benchmarks for medically acceptable wait times".

Wait times working group interested in looking beyond a clinical definition of evidence. Hence, our first question:

- In addition to research on health outcomes, what other forms of information count as evidence for clinical, management, or policy decision-making in the health sector?

Consideration of 'kinds of evidence' lead to a second question on how to combine the forms of evidence:

- How can various forms of evidence and stakeholder perspectives be combined through a deliberative process to yield evidence-informed guidance for health systems?

What is meant by guidance?

- Not the same as research summaries or synthesis
- Not the same as drawing implications from research
- Not the same as evidence-based decision-making

Guidance

Guidance is the set of options presented to decision makers by neutral parties on what to do in response to a particular issue and how to do it. Evidence-informed guidance goes beyond summarizing or synthesis of research: it makes recommendations for concrete action that consider scientifically proven practices and the contextual factors moderating implementability.

What is evidence? – A reminder

Evidence

- 1) Systematic reviews and meta-analyses
- 2) Randomised controlled trials with definitive results
- 3) Randomised controlled trials with definitive results
- 4) Case-control studies
- 5) Case-control studies
- 6) Cross sectional surveys
- 7) Case reports

Evidence is "anything that establishes a fact or gives reason for believing something" (Oxford American Dictionary, 1980)

- 5) Case-control studies
 - 6) Cross sectional surveys
 - 7) Case reports
- (Pettigrew and Roberts 2003, 527).

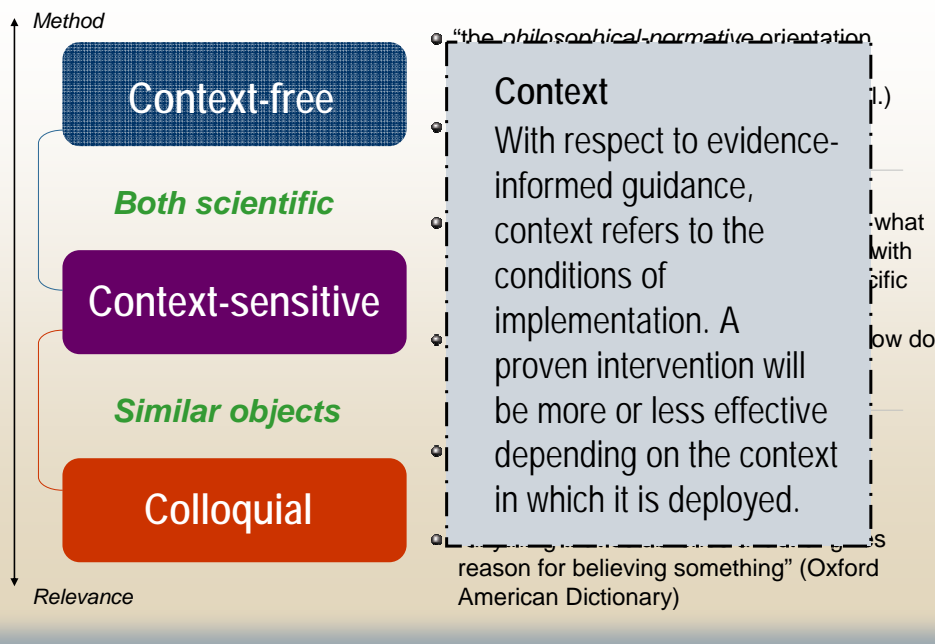


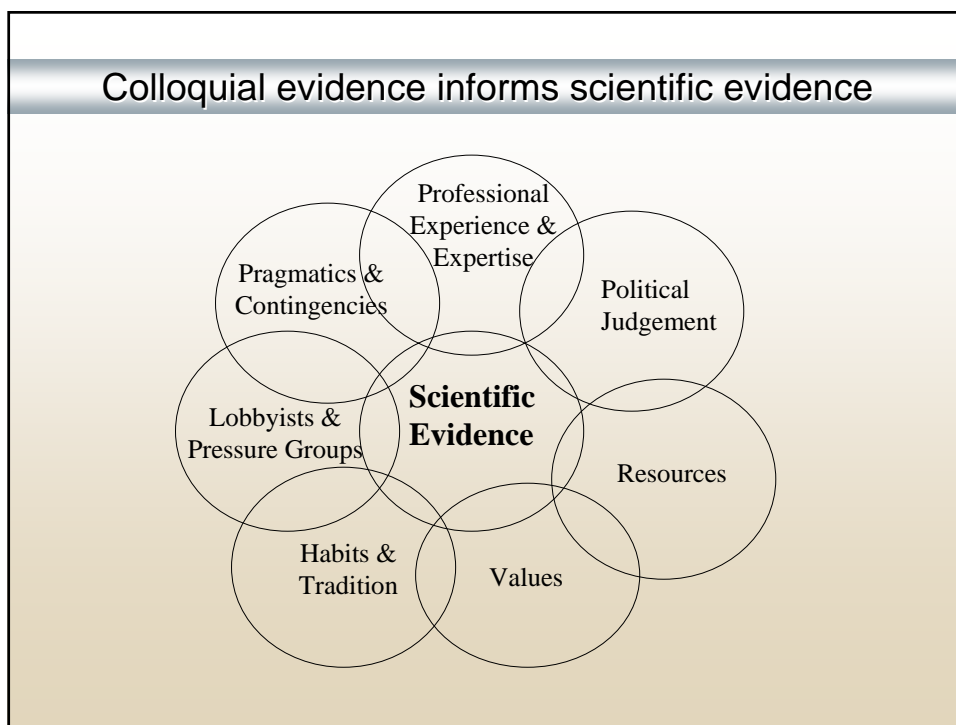
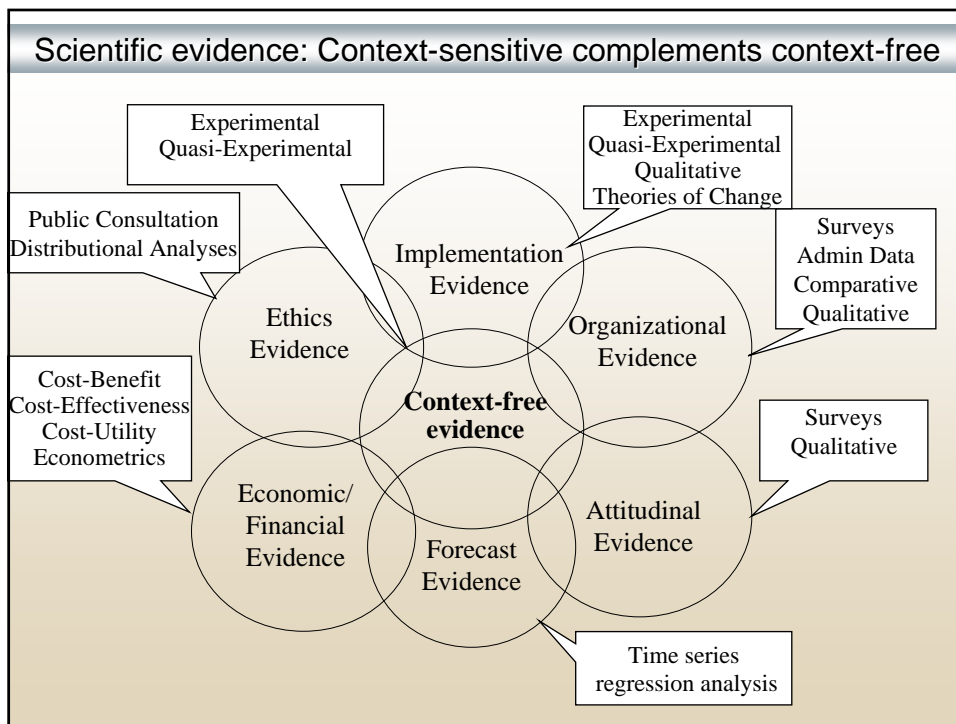
Discounting the Legal Concept

Healthcare guidance evidence clearly distinguished from legal concepts of evidence

- “law relies on evidence of the instance; health care relies on evidence of the generalizable” (Eisenberg, 2001)
- law has the benefit of 20:20 hindsight on the past, guidance is recommending best options for the future

Evidence Comes in Kinds





Evidence Defined (finally)

CHSRF Mission

To support **evidence**-informed decision-making in the organization, management and delivery of health services through funding research, building capacity and transferring knowledge.

Evidence is information that comes closest to the facts of a matter. The form it takes depends on context. The findings of high quality, methodologically appropriate research are the most accurate evidence. Because research is often incomplete and sometimes contradictory or unavailable, other kinds of information are necessary supplements to or stand-ins for research. The evidence base for a decision is the multiple forms of evidence combined to balance rigour with expedience – while privileging the former over the latter.

Why a deliberative process?

...such that the values influencing the assignment of weight are not hidden but explicit.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

— 1 Corinthians 13:12

The synthesis of the research evidence may be rigorous and transparent, but the judgments tend to be opaque.

— Raine et al., 2003

Where we started

To move from evidence to guidance we must draw on values and make judgments.

Solutions to combining **scientific** evidence do exist, **but**:

- algorithmic approaches tend to “bury under a series of assumptions many value judgments that may or may not reflect those of the broader population” (Lomas et al., 2003); and
- scientific and colloquial evidence are too dissimilar to be combined without transparent deliberation.



What is a deliberative process?

Petts definition

A deliberative process is a “participatory process that has clear objectives; is inclusive and transparent; challenges science; promotes dialogue between all parties; promotes a consensus about the potential decision, and directly impacts [sic] on the decision itself” (Petts, 2004)

Our definition

A deliberative process is a tool for producing guidance based on heterogeneous evidence. It is a participatory process that includes representation from both experts and stakeholders, face-to-face interaction, criteria for the sources of scientific evidence and their weight, and a mechanism for eliciting colloquial evidence while making it subsidiary to the science.

Reasons to use a deliberative process

Technical

Eliciting and combining evidence

- To bring evidence together and weigh it all up
- To reveal “evidence” not otherwise available
- Exposing and/or resolving conflict over evidence

Practical

Producing implementable guidance

- To get potential opposition inside the tent
- To let all stakeholders have their say
- To embody implementation issues of specific contexts

Nature and role of

colloquial evidence changes

Political

Democratic governance

- Involvement of people in their own governance
- Transparency and accountability
- To embody the public’s values

Thank you. Merci.



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For copies of our reports go to: www.chsr.ca/other_documents/evidence_e.php