



# The practice of evidence-based decision making among healthcare managers in Victoria:

## Implications to researchers and research institutions

SHAPE Symposium 2009

Dr. Zhanming Liang  
Senior Lecturer, Health Services Management,  
School of Public Health, La Trobe University  
[z.liang@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:z.liang@latrobe.edu.au)

Dr. Peter Howard  
Adjunct Associate Professor  
[p.howard@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:p.howard@latrobe.edu.au)



# Background and Project

- ◆ What is evidence-based decision making in health service management?
- ◆ Why there is a need for making management decisions based on evidence now?
- ◆ What do we know about the current practice among healthcare managers?
- ◆ The project: March 09 – March 09



# Key research questions

- ◆ What value do health managers place on different types of evidence in decision-making?
- ◆ How often do they use evidence to guide their day-to-day decision-making process as a manager?
- ◆ What are participants' preferred methods for receiving research information?
- ◆ What are participants' preferred formats for the presentation of research information?
- ◆ What is the relative importance of identified barriers and facilitators on the practice of evidence-based decision making among senior healthcare managers?
- ◆ What can be done to improve the practice of evidence-based decision making amongst healthcare managers?

# Funding and Support



- ◆ Jointly funded by ACHSE Vic Branch and School of Public Health, La Trobe University
- ◆ Other Members of the Advisory Committee
  - ◆ Mr. David Webb (ACSHE)
  - ◆ A/Prof John Rasa (ACSHE)
  - ◆ A/Prof Greg Murphy (La Trobe)
  - ◆ Dr. Heather Buchan (NICS)



# Study Methods

- ◆ Target population and sampling frame
- ◆ First focus group discussion
- ◆ Online and paper-based questionnaire
- ◆ Second focus group discussion
- ◆ Response rate

# What is evidence in health service management decision making?



Academic's perception

# What is evidence in health service management decision making? – manager's perception

## ◆ Rating of importance of evidence format:

- ◆ Internally developed data (92%)
- ◆ Quantitative research (88%)
- ◆ Best practice (86%)
- ◆ Stakeholders' preference (83%)
- ◆ Examples of external practice (82%)
- ◆ Qualitative research evidence (78%)
- ◆ Expert opinions (78%)

## ◆ Ranking of evidence format based on usefulness

- ◆ Internally developed data (77%)
- ◆ Examples of external practice (68%)
- ◆ Expert opinions (67%)
- ◆ The least useful: qualitative research (52%)

# Current practice –highlight of findings

- ◆ Frequency of evidence use (use more than once a month in the last three months)
  - ◆ Information based on experience (82%)
  - ◆ Internally developed data (68%)
  - ◆ Stakeholder preference (37%)
  - ◆ Quantitative research evidence (21%)
  - ◆ Expert opinions (16%)
  - ◆ Best practice (15%)
  - ◆ Qualitative research (15%)
  
- ◆ Forms of evidence used for specific decision making process – sum up
  - ◆ Information within organisations (4/6)
  - ◆ Best practice (4/6)
  - ◆ Own experience (4/6)
  - ◆ Expert opinions (3/6)



# What messages have we got?

- ◆ Non-research evidence - 'Internally developed data' or 'information from within the organisation' were considered the most useful evidence type, used most frequently and consistently in various decision making processes
- ◆ 'Best practice reports' (may not be research evidence) were perceived as the third most important evidence type and frequently used as primary source of evidence in the decision making processes
- ◆ "Examples of external evidence" (may not be research evidence) highly ranked as both important and useful form of evidence, but were not commonly used as the primary source of evidence in the six stages of decision making processes
- ◆ "Own experience" were not perceived as the most useful evidence type, but were frequently used as primary source of evidence in the decision making processes
- ◆ Both 'quantitative and qualitative research evidence were perceived as important evidence type. But the frequency of their use were low, and they rarely contribute to the six stages of decision making processes

# Why scientific evidence was not taken up – factors that relevant to us as researchers

- ◆ Preference of formats by which evidence is presented:
  - ◆ Executive summaries (90%)
  - ◆ Best practice guidelines (55%)
  - ◆ Abstracts (45%)
  - ◆ Original articles/reports (40%)
  - ◆ Briefing notes (39%)
  - ◆ Topic summaries (30%)
- ◆ Three most important factors that would encourage the search for and application of evidence in management
  - ◆ Collaboration between researchers and managers (40%)
  - ◆ Commitment to evidence-based practice (38%)
  - ◆ Critical appraisal skills (26%)

# Why scientific evidence was not taken up – factors that relevant to us as researchers

## ◆ Barriers to evidence-based management practice

- ◆ Time availability (82%)
- ◆ **Relevance of management research (73%)**
- ◆ A lack of financial resources to support best practice (72%)
- ◆ **Availability of topical management research (70%)**
- ◆ A lack of leadership support (63%)
- ◆ A lack of policy and political will (63%)
- ◆ **Accessibility of health management research (63%)**
- ◆ **A lack of critical appraisal skills (51%)**



# What do managers really want from us?

- ◆ To exam the style of research evidence being presented
  - ◆ Using simple and user friendly language
  - ◆ More useful summaries or abstracts
  - ◆ Considering managers are important readers
- ◆ To produce research evidence that are of managers' interests
  - ◆ Research questions relate to matters in areas of high value and high risk to managers (rather than researchers)
  - ◆ Context sensitive and locally conducted
  - ◆ Also focusing on how to make things work (processes)

# How to encourage the current and future practice of EBM?

## Implications to researchers and research institutions

- ◆ To strengthen relationship and cooperation between researchers and managers in setting research agendas relevant to managers
- ◆ To present research evidence in a simple format using plain language. Hybrid formats between business reports with literature embedded and formats for presenting research evidence may be developed maintaining rigor and standards but with more story and context.
- ◆ To improve research papers' applicability by including a description of processes and indications of the practical implications of the research.
- ◆ To review and encourage the usefulness of executive summaries, topic summaries and abstracts in presenting major findings and implications of the projects and research and in generating readers' interests in accessing the full research report/article.
- ◆ To review the focus of health service management research to ensure that it is context sensitive, applicable to local practice and be of high importance to health service managers.
- ◆ Development/training programs should focus on improving the competency of healthcare managers in critical appraisal and report writing

**The end of presentation!**



# Research Implementation vs. Recommendations Uptake

- ◆ Working closely with the Advisory Committee in every step including project design, development of focus group discussion questions and survey questionnaires
- ◆ Keeping relevant stakeholders informed of the progress and constantly generating their interest in the project
- ◆ Allowing ownerships sharing
- ◆ Allowing adequate time for feedback especially on the format and presentation of the project report
- ◆ Presenting findings to relevant audience
- ◆ Very importantly – set the goal clear right at the start – we want our findings to be seen by wide range of audience and the strategies to be adopted to improve practice.