Designing a Collaborative Approach to Healthcare Network Evaluation

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Abstract

Background
Palliative and hospice care has emerged as a specialist field of practice over the past 20 years. Key drivers include response to changing patterns of diseases and their trajectories across the globe; a strong voluntary funding and community support base; and a philosophy of care that conflicts with a bio-medical and cure oriented view that characterises modern healthcare. Against this background, a policy is in place in Ireland since 2001 and which sets out the need for access to palliative care for all based on need. Beyond outputs in terms of structures and staffing, evaluation of palliative care has proven to be illusive. Reasons include multi-stakeholder involvement and limited consensus over outcomes; a strong voluntary sector that seeks to partner but remain outside statutory services and governance; and shifting roles among specialist palliative care and other healthcare professionals in care delivery towards end of life.

Aim
The aim of this paper is to present a proposed evaluation model to investigate palliative and hospice care programmes that involve multiple stakeholders and different perspectives for example the hospital seeking to integrate palliative care across different disease groups right down to how a team evaluates its approach to care involving two teams (palliative and whatever other specialist team).

Design
An action research collaborative design is proposed for the study of a consortium of hospices and universities supported by a diverse funding base, including Atlantic Philanthropies involved in the provision of palliative and hospice care in Ireland. The core partnership evaluation framework is based on an original research involving partnership between four health care organizations and one centre of higher education. In particular, the model accommodates conflicting viewpoints in respect of structures, processes and outcomes for palliative service development and care delivery. The design is underpinned by the idea of iteration of planning, implementing and evaluating responses to changes in capacity of and intentionality among different stakeholders struggling to respond to service needs.

Data Sources
In keeping with an action research collaborative design, multiple sources of data are proposed to elicit evidence and relevant real life experiences from a wide range of service users, patients, family members, service providers and policy makers.

Results
The main findings of the proposed evaluation study will relate to the applicability and the relevance and suitability of the model in relation to the provision of palliative and hospice care.

Conclusions
Clear statements as to whether the actual partnership framework offered a constructive mechanism within which to guide the palliative and hospice care network itself and to measure its performance in relation to meeting the needs of individual, family and communities will be provided. In addition, the potential relevance of this framework to the organization and reform of health systems will be identified.