

Summary from SEARCH Fellowship Research Project:

From individual learning through SEARCH to a culture of evidence-based practice in the Calgary Health Region

Prepared by San Patten ~ April 24, 2007

This summary is provided in order to facilitate a discussion amongst members of the SEARCH Advisory Committee and the SEARCH Network about how to enhance the role of SEARCHers within the Calgary Health Region. Preliminary themes and their summaries are provided here, but please note that a full report of the study findings will be produced in June 2007.

Support of Current SEARCHers

- A key element in support for CHR staff while enrolled in SEARCH is the amount of overlap and alignment between participants' work and their SEARCH projects – the more, the better. Ideally, a SEARCH participant finds an individual project that is a close fit to her regular work duties, but also has organizational relevance at a broad, cross-regional level beyond her own team. The challenge for SEARCH participants and their manager is to find an individual project that is a balance between personal interest and organizational priorities. These organizational priorities are identified by the CHR's CEOs, board members and senior management, and ideally are linked with the CHR's strategic planning processes.
- A ubiquitous theme raised by all SEARCH participants and their managers was the difficulty in protecting time to work on individual and group SEARCH projects. While the SEARCH participants are officially meant to have 0.4 FTE protected for SEARCH-related work, the reality is much less.
- SEARCH participants are selected partly on the basis of candidates having opportunities to leverage his/her learnings via system reach (including departmental, organizational and professional reach). But more formal mechanisms need to be implemented by managers and the CHR as a whole to create and facilitate these opportunities.
- Prerequisite for support of current SEARCHers is that their teams are aware of their involvement with SEARCH. This awareness was evident through casual inquiries about their progress in SEARCH, through regular verbal/written updates to managers, as well as a standing agenda item in staff meetings. This awareness, in turn, allows SEARCH participants to ask for ideas and support, and share information learned at the SEARCH modules (e.g., the process of research, threats to validity in research projects, question design, how to sample a representative cross-section of clients, ethical considerations, and how to read and critically appraise research articles).
- Some SEARCH participants noted a lack of understanding of the time commitment of their involvement in SEARCH. Support and commitment from a SEARCH manager is not necessarily synonymous with departmental commitment and support.
- Key informants noted the need for a means by which the reports from individual SEARCH projects can be collected and disseminated. They identified the need to promote the projects being completed by the SEARCH participants.
- Role of a SEARCH manager is not only to protect the time of the SEARCH participant so that he/she may fully engage in the SEARCH program without being overburdened by regular work duties, but also to market and promote the SEARCH participant's new capacities with senior management and with other staff members.

Ongoing Support for Skill Development After SEARCH

- The managers and SEARCH participants were asked to describe any committees, projects, venues or events which provided opportunities for sharing research knowledge gained through the SEARCH program. Examples of supportive structures include:
 - SEARCH Advisory Committee
 - Research Initiatives Team
 - Learning and Development Division, Higher Order of Thinking Program
 - VP Professional Resources & Research
 - Quality, Safety and Health Information portfolio
 - Strategic Research and Development Committee
 - Calgary Health Research Day
 - CHR website, Frontlines newsletter, *News You Can Use*, email listserves to site staff
 - Community Health Sciences seminars (University of Calgary)
 - Regional Strategic Research and Evaluation Council
 - Information Management Steering Committee
 - CIO portfolio
- More formal recognition was needed by these structures of the potential contribution of SEARCH participants. At present, there are no formal mechanisms or structures tying SEARCH participants into these committees and structures.
- Former SEARCH participants need to be given time to apply research findings after the completion of the SEARCH program, to complete their individual projects, follow research or program “spin-offs,” and conduct knowledge exchange to put research into practice (e.g., program development, modifications to service delivery, design of clinical practice protocols)
- SEARCH participants want opportunities to apply their direct research skills, literature searching and reviewing, critical analysis, facilitation skills, leadership and management skills, and knowledge brokering. Some of the key informants noted that it is not reasonable to expect that SEARCH participants are fully qualified researchers upon completion of the SEARCH program.
- The SEARCH program and participants needs to be ‘marketed’ within the health region to highlight the skills and expertise that participants can contribute to decision-making. This marketing would build organizational support for the SEARCH program and its participants, as well as facilitate the active application of participants’ expertise.
- During the SEARCH V interviews, additional recommendations were made to increase research capacity and supports in the Calgary Health Region, including:
 - encourage continued growth and opportunities for all SEARCH applicants (e.g. to meet with the Managers and SEARCH applicants who were not selected to participate)
 - enhance librarian services (e.g. to support literature review processes)
 - offer basic and more advanced research training available to interested staff (e.g. QIHI is building a mini-SEARCH program into their staff training)
 - enhance the role for decision support research style teams in the Calgary Health Region
 - host best practices think tanks regarding priority issues
 - encourage creativity in implementing evidence-based practices
 - have research as a standing agenda item in staff meetings
 - continue to identify areas in which we want to enhance our understanding as a Region
 - invest in a research culture
 - build opportunities for SEARCH participants to mentor other Calgary Health Region staff

- offer supports to build capacity in community settings (e.g. 8th and 8th)
- SEARCH participants can have most influence if they are in operational or cross-regional positions, or if they work on the development of a conceptual framework, practice model or protocol, that is applicable across many (or all) service delivery areas.
- One structure that has been envisioned is a SEARCH Decision Support Team which would be comprised of past SEARCH participants with the role of supporting policy decisions, helping to identify research literature and best practices.

Networking

- Of the 21 individuals who completed the SEARCH program while employed in the CHR, four have left the CHR. Of the CHR staff members who remain with the organization, the majority have changed positions or at least job titles.
- SEARCH participants demonstrate that there is a strong social dimension of problem solving and knowledge brokering through networking, identifying the appropriate persons for information, teamwork and collaboration, dialoguing to solve problems, and relationship management. SEARCH participants report that they tend to seek information from a colleague first, rather than search a database or ‘cold-call’ an expert who is a stranger. An important outcome of the SEARCH program is the development of expanded professional networks within and between health regions.
- Several key informants have noted that the CHR needs an ongoing structure that facilitates networking amongst SEARCH participants that is action-oriented and serves purposes beyond networking and information sharing. This structure would be focused on a common issue for which a decision is needed, with active sharing of evidence, discussion and analysis, and project development or implementation.
- Opportunity for nurturing relationships amongst SEARCH participants in the CHR has not been fully optimized, as the CHR SEARCH networking meetings are inconsistently attended and lack clear purpose.
- One of the main benefits of the SEARCH program for CHR staff was being able to identify key positions in the CHR that are best able to exert influence in decision making. SEARCH participants also noted that their participation in SEARCH had opened opportunities for them to expand their department’s network to academic researchers as well as professional networks through participation in a research conference.
- Several of the SEARCH participants reported that they had been called upon by their colleagues for assistance with literature reviewing. Requests for information came through emails from colleagues, some of whom may not necessarily be aware of the SEARCH program, but who hear that the SEARCH participant is a good resource for assistance with literature reviewing.
- Managers play an important role in facilitating opportunities for SEARCH participants to contribute through committee work.