

Editorial

WANTED: Articles on development of PHC services and practice

One of the main aims of this journal is to support the publication of articles which present evidence from development projects and activities. In 1997, when we first discussed setting up this journal, we were concerned that development activities were often reported locally but that lessons from such work rarely found a wider audience in either academic or professional journals. Part of the reason for this is that much research is concerned with description (for example, what is the level of asthma in this community) or with measuring the effectiveness of interventions (for example, the efficacy of one drug over another). The main purpose of such research is not to change or develop practice.

St Leger and Walsworth-Bell (1999) argue that the majority of research within health care should be applied research and concerned with change using the term *change-promoting research* to describe this approach to Research and Development (R&D): 'Moreover, it will follow that *research* and *development* cease to be confusingly different in kind; they differ in degree but can only usefully be understood as inextricably linked.' (St Leger and Walsworth-Bell, 1999:28). These authors put forward a plan to implement change-producing research within the NHS and thus in primary health care. One of their recommendations is that 'A new journal of change-promoting research could make a useful contribution.' (St Leger and Walsworth-Bell, 1999: 220). Our aim is that this journal should, in part, achieve this objective in primary health care (PHC).

It is sometimes forgotten that the UK NHS R&D strategy is only 20 years old in 2001. Given this short history and the lack of robust research in many areas of health care, it is not surprising that the strategy has focused on research rather than development. However, there is evidence that this emphasis is changing. The recent national plan for the NHS in England (Department of Health, 2000)

describes a Modernization Agency which will assist local health providers to improve services around the needs of patients. This agency will bring together existing organizations including the Primary Care Development Team and the Beacon programme, which identifies and disseminates information on sites of good practice. The emphasis is on the organizational development of services.

This is also the emphasis of the new NHS Service and Organization National R&D Programme. This programme is, in part, concerned with promotion of the use of research findings about ways in which services could be better organized. The authors comment: 'The view of development used by the NHS R&D Programme to date has been limited to ensuring 'relevant information [was] freely available ... and packaged to secure practical application' (Department of Health, 1993)' (Fulop and Allen, 2000: 24). A distinction is made in the programme between the use of the term development to describe 'communication' or 'dissemination' of research findings, an essential but largely passive process on the part of the researchers and readers and development as 'implementation' – an active process which may or may not involve the original researchers but will definitely involve the wider health care community.

The recently launched network for Innovation in Health Visiting and School Nursing (Centre for Innovation in Primary Care, 2000) seeks to use information technology to enable the dissemination of lessons from change initiatives in practice to provide information for others to replicate the change.

These initiatives and others indicate that there is a growing interest in learning lessons about successful change and development projects. We would therefore like to encourage readers to submit articles to the journal on development work in which they have been involved, whether as

researchers, practitioners, managers, educators or users. Development papers may be focused on a number of different aspects of a development activity (for example, the process of change, or the methods used to evaluate the development) but will contain at least one of the following features. Development papers will discuss a local issue, discuss the introduction of an innovation, consider matters concerned with reflective practice or developing practice, relate to issues of learning and dissemination in PHC, inform a new area of research, and address issues of evaluation.

Papers are reviewed by two referees using guidelines specifically developed for the consideration of development papers. These guidelines ask the reviewers to consider whether the author has used current evidence to inform the development, whether the rationale and policy context for the development are clearly described, whether the development itself is presented in detail and is based on existing evidence, how the conclusions are drawn from the development activity and whether areas for further research or practice development have been identified, and whether the author has presented a critical analysis of the development identifying strengths and weaknesses in the process which will be of particular importance to readers who may be interested in replicating the development. Where the development has been evaluated the reviewers are asked to consider the presentation of the process and methods

of evaluation and where evaluation has not taken place whether there is evidence of the rationale for this or plans for future evaluation. In all other respects development articles are expected to adhere to the general guidelines for papers for the journal.

As primary health care is involved in an enormous amount of practice, organizational, educational and other forms of development, many readers of this journal will be involved in development work. If you would like to discuss ideas for articles, please contact one of the editors. We look forward to receiving your articles on change-promoting research!

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