Quality and evidence-based Canadian healthcare through integration of health research (Panel)

Health research includes those activities undertaken to generate knowledge used to promote, restore and maintain the health of Canadians. Despite the synchronous goals of healthcare and health research, there has been a long-standing separation between them in Canada and this has resulted in a knowledge translation death valley that has significantly limited the successful application of evidence-based practices. Attendees of this panel presentation will benefit from four learning objectives: 1) understand the rationale for integrating research into the Canadian healthcare system; 2) learn about the characteristics of learning healthcare systems; 3) hear examples of organizations that are achieving transformation from antiquated, hospital-centric delivery models to learning health care systems; and 4) obtain practical, evidence-based recommendations on how to make this transition within their organization, from front-line operations through to executive management.

Modern healthcare systems prioritize the quality of care they deliver, where quality is generally defined around Maxwell’s six dimensions – access, relevance, effectiveness, equity, acceptability and efficiency. In an international survey, Canada ranked the lowest in provision of quality healthcare as compared to other Commonwealth countries. This represents significant risks to Canadian healthcare, including failing to deliver appropriate treatments to patients and failing to obtain maximum value for the increasing revenues spent on healthcare. Research is essential to achieving health care quality since it is only through disciplined inquiry that evidence-based healthcare to improve diagnostic tools and treatment options is possible. Furthermore, research is a key component of learning healthcare systems, as defined by the Institute of Medicine, “systems…in which knowledge generation is so embedded into the core of the practice of medicine that it is a natural outgrowth and product of the healthcare delivery process and leads to continual improvement in care.”

There are numerous, measurable benefits for healthcare organizations that integrate research with care delivery. Patients treated at hospitals where there is a focus on research have lowered mortality rates and enabling patients to become partners in research aimed at solving health issues is a tangible way to practice person-centred healthcare. Clinicians working within hospitals where there is a focus on research find it easy and rewarding to provide the best care. Leaders and decision-makers within hospitals where there is a focus on research are able to successfully transform their organizations into learning healthcare systems.

Powered by new capabilities such as electronic health records and facilitated by new cultural norms based on collaboration and openness, the Canadian healthcare enterprise is now well positioned to integrate health research into healthcare in the pursuit of evidence-based care.