

PROMISING PRACTICES in Research Use

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Organizations investing in people, processes, and structures to increase their capacity to use research

How a regional health authority is helping its people better use research in decision-making

The EXTRA fellows of Capital Health

Some people believe that leadership skills can't be taught but are something you're born with. At Halifax's Capital Health District, the administration believes leadership can be nurtured as well as informed by evidence.

Just as important, leaders who know how to access, understand, adapt, and apply research evidence can make better decisions. That's why the health district has supported four of its executives to take part in the Executive Training for Research Application (EXTRA*) program. EXTRA is a two-year fellowship program that trains these executives to find research evidence and use it in their daily work to improve decision-making. It also includes components on leadership training.

Dr. Steven Soroka says that the leadership framework taught in the program has helped improve the quality of decision-making in Capital Health's renal program, which he has a major leadership role in. "We have created an executive management team for the renal program based on several components of the EXTRA residency sessions. This includes representatives from physician and nursing groups," says Dr. Soroka. "Now when we have a problem in the program it goes to the team, and we have five or six different people looking at it from different angles, each bringing their evidence-based perspectives.

"This is a much more cohesive team approach to solving problems; it's a better decision-making process."

Susan Smith, the director of medical services, is putting her experience in EXTRA to work in making physician resource planning more evidence-informed as the district develops its plan for the next five years. In the past, individual departments planned for new physician resources without considering the actual costs to the organization, in terms of support staff, funding, space, etc., and without speaking with the other departments to determine effects on other services.

"We developed an instrument that asks each discipline at Capital Health for their requirements for additional physician resources based on evidence of need," says Ms. Smith. "We consolidated all that information across the organization, and then we put all those departmental chiefs in a room and

* The EXTRA program was set up with a grant from Health Canada. The views expressed within the program do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

Key Messages

- Healthcare organizations can see clear benefits when they support the development of the skills management and policy leaders need to understand and apply research results.
- That's why organizations support health services professionals in senior management positions to take part in programs like EXTRA, where they develop the skills to better use research in their daily work.
- By investing in their senior staff, healthcare organizations can see and demonstrate improvements to the quality of management and policy decision-making.

required they talk to one another. Those conversations had never happened before, and they all found them quite valuable, because it made them consider their needs in terms of the whole organization, not just their department."

Don Ford, the president and chief executive officer of Capital Health who serves as the EXTRA fellows' organizational sponsor, says that while the investment both in money and time is significant, the program has proven itself worthwhile.

"I think our track record (of four fellows in two years) speaks for itself," says Mr. Ford. "We see the value in helping our managers develop themselves with the rigour this program brings. We've seen the experiences they've been exposed to have been stimulating and they've come back with a renewed commitment to ensuring evidence-based decision-making."

For more information on the EXTRA program, please visit www.chsrf.ca/extra.

For more information on Capital Health District, please visit www.cdha.nshealth.ca.

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Are you interested in bringing this practice to your organization? The foundation may be able to help. Please visit www.chsrf.ca/promising for information.

You can also find more stories about how organizations are increasing their capacity to use research and tell us your own stories, which may be used for future instalments of this series.