



BEST EVIDENCE MEDICAL EDUCATION GUIDANCE PAPER: USING EVIDENCE TO INFORM MEDICAL EDUCATION PRACTICE AND POLICY

This BEME guidance paper aims to assist education practitioners and policy makers as they seek to use research evidence in decision making in education practice and policy development. The paper was compiled by the participants of two HEA MEDEV Subject Centre and Best Evidence Medical Education workshops in March and May 2010. Participants worked in small groups to formulate, and then to refine, suggestions related to the process of using evidence, the people involved and the nature of evidence. Comments and suggestions for change and additions are welcome.

The Process

Essential aspects of encouraging the use of research evidence within an institution or faculty are:

- Dissemination of appropriate research evidence and communication of how it is being used in decision making
- Ensuring that the process of using evidence is transparent and explicit in documentation
- Implementing an organic change methodology to support evidence use, i.e. one that is flexible, responsive, adaptable
- Ensuring clarity about the purpose of making the change, being sure that the change is necessary, and keeping an open mind about what sort of change will be the one of choice
- Taking into account the context in which the anticipated change will happen
- Decision making should also include a cost-benefit analysis of the suggested change and an assessment of what is practical, feasible and acceptable in a given context.

The People

Interested and enthusiastic people are essential to the success of a commitment to using research evidence: the following suggestions aim to support them.

- Form a team of people/community of practice with an interest in using evidence, appoint a leader, ensure expertise is available when necessary in data analysis, administration and information science services support, and have stakeholder representatives.
- Identify a champion, someone who is enthusiastic about using evidence
 - Set objectives about how this person will make a difference
 - Ask for their input and guidance early in the change process
 - Ensure they have relevant and transferable experience and have the influence and power to be effective.
- Implement staff development in evidence informed practice and policy

- Appoint someone to be responsible for this
- Identify resources and support for implementation
- Form a network group/hold seminars/share experiences/journal clubs
- Identify an external broker or critical friend to monitor the use of evidence in decision making and who can offer an objective opinion on the process of using evidence
- Recognise that the external broker could be more than one person and may, for example, be an external examiner, journal editor or representative from a regulatory body.
- Ensure that all stakeholders (staff, students, service users) are involved in reviewing the available evidence.

The Nature of the Evidence

The process of using evidence involves ensuring a scholarly and critical approach to the types of evidence that can be used, to that end it is valuable to:-

- Ensure that both internal (institutional, uni-professional) and external research evidence is used and
 - Identify sources of information and where to find them
 - Identify/define current best practice
 - Distinguish when generic and subject specialist research evidence is appropriate
- First identify what research evidence is available and, if necessary, commission systematic reviews in a specific topic
- Develop strategies for identifying and using different levels of evidence
- Recognise that craft and experiential knowledge is also of value when decisions about changes to teaching and learning strategies are being made