

**The Top Five Strategies to Enable the Use of Evidence-Based Programs:
Results from the 18th Annual Research Conference: A System of Care for Children's
Mental Health**

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Introduction

Evidence-based programs and practices are being emphasized as answers to long-standing criticisms of variable, often ineffective, and sometimes harmful practices in human services (Institute of Medicine, 2002). The field is searching for better ways of implementing them with fidelity and good outcome (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). Last year, participants at the RTC Conference were informally interviewed to gain insight into their reasons NOT to adopt evidence-based practices and programs. The top five reasons were:

1. Research base is not convincing
2. Evidence-based programs are difficult to implement
3. Evidence-based programs require too much change
4. Evidence-based programs are incomplete given the problems we face
5. Infrastructure for implementation does not exist or is not supported

The purpose of the survey reported here was to obtain information on some of the reasons FOR adopting evidence-based practices and programs.

Methods

At the poster session sponsored by the Conference, the authors developed an interactive presentation on 'The Top Five Strategies to Enable the Use of Evidence-Based Programs', in which the authors interviewed conference attendees who passed by the poster location. Conference attendees who voluntarily participated in this interactive presentation were asked if they were currently involved in using an evidence-based program. If the participant replied in the affirmative, the authors asked what their experience had been on the front end when the evidence-based program was being considered and just starting to be implemented. If the participant replied in the negative, the authors then asked them about the reasons they might have for considering using an evidence-based program. Participants were then asked if they would like to contribute their comments to the authors' list of 'Strategies to Enable the Use of Evidence-Based Programs'. Participant's comments were then placed on the poster, where other participants and conference attendees could see their comments.

Results

The authors categorized the participant's comments to arrive at the top five strategies to enable the use of evidence-based programs. The reasons for using evidence-based programs (with a few comments from participants) are briefly summarized below.

1. Enhance effectiveness of interventions
 - Change what we are doing to be more effective
 - Get past fragmentation
 - Produce good outcomes (get rid of “flim-flammers”)
2. Improve provider organizations
 - Training and ongoing supervision
 - Mechanisms to maintain fidelity
 - Have the evidence-based program drive the organizational structure
3. Availability of funding for evidence-based practices and programs
 - Funding available for evidence-based practices
 - Most evidence-based practices and programs are affordable
 - Promote policies that support funding for implementation of evidence-based practices and programs
4. Adaptability of evidence-based practices and programs
 - Allow different cultures to modify evidence-based practices and programs to fit their culture
 - Flexibility of evidence-based practices and programs and their implementation
 - Allows for evolution from a known base
5. Availability of useful information
 - Systematic reviews (Campbell Collaborative equals credibility)
 - Clinicians have ready access to internet to get information
 - Regional conferences and trainings

Discussion

These interviews were conducted to gain insight into the views of practitioners and administrators in the field. Needless to say, the sample was self-selected and the results are not generalizable. However, they do provide a glimpse of what some people are thinking and they might stimulate some discussion and thought. It was interesting that evidence-based practices and programs were seen not only as good ways to promote better practices but also as good ways to change provider organizations. It was encouraging to note that information about evidence-based practices and programs is seen as readily available and funding for better practices and their implementation is viewed as accessible.

When we compared the items generated last year (reasons NOT to use evidence-based practices and programs) with those generated this year (reasons FOR), we found many similarities. The similarities in the pros and cons tell us that the reasons/strategies that facilitate the use of evidence-based practices and programs for some may be barriers for others and may depend on the context/environment in which they are implemented. Although we have a lot of evidence about “programs that work,” we have much less knowledge about the implementation and dissemination of evidence-based practices and programs in real world settings. There is still much more to be learned from program developers and implementation sites that are implementing evidence-based practices in the field.

References

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