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ASIA EDITION

Real-world evidence-backed scientific data are imperative to improve healthcare practices

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"A rapid and effective communication of clinical and scientific data is essential to redirect the financing and research ecosystem in order to tackle global health concerns" explains Dr Ximena Alvira, Clinical and Research Manager at Elsevier



According to a joint report by the World Health Organization and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2020, uneven distribution of health workers in Asia Pacific is a serious concern.

The same study also revealed that the majority of health workers tend to be concentrated in urban areas. This leaves a shortage of health workers in remote and rural areas that results in poor availability of health services, particularly for vulnerable populations. Many also fail to keep pace with the latest data-driven approach to health care.

The past two years has seen to a significant shift in the way people perceive, consume and practice medical research, including unprecedented interest in research, increased collaboration and more funding.

An evidence-based approach backed by research could be key to improving healthcare in such resource-limited countries, as it can optimize clinical practices and result in more cost-effective treatments, allowing for greater accessibility to quality healthcare.

The value of culture of evidence

Application of evidence-based research in health care practice is important. Through equipping clinicians with reliable evidence, it has the potential to improve disease diagnosis and implementation of treatment plans. It can lead to an improvement in the results of the patients and the quality and efficiency of medical care.

According to a research by APACMed, incorporation and utilization of real-world evidence is an imperative, especially to cater to the diverse and specific patient populations in Asia.

This is especially true in rural areas where there is a widespread reliance on traditional remedies which may not be evidence-backed. In a number of cases, practicing home based remedies can actually be harmful, as evidenced from the a research conducted in Indonesia, where almost 40% of hospitalization cases of children surveyed were correlated with the use of

‘traditional medicine’.

On the other hand, ensuring an evidence-based healthcare practice and higher public health literacy levels is associated with more effective patient-centric care and improved patient outcomes.

As such, there is a need to instill evidenced-based clinical practices within the healthcare sector by creating a culture that encourages and ensures high quality, ethical and transparent clinical research.

This can be achieved through ramping up public health education, to cover the importance of health research and culture of evidence and educating healthcare providers to inculcate an evidence-based approach to their practice.

Research priorities since the pandemic and beyond

The recent global pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to mobilize the research community, and to align and accelerate processes related to research and scientific publication worldwide.

During the past year, the need for rapid and effective communication of clinical and scientific data has been recognized. There has been a swift redirection of priorities and efforts, in terms of financing and from the research community, to target major health threats that afflict large populations globally.

In Australia specifically, investment has been channeled towards Tuberculosis research, a disease that is still rife across Asia Pacific, to facilitate tuberculosis screening and eradication programs. This was partly attributed to the increased interest in epidemiology of diseases that came with the pandemic.

While there is commendable growth in the investment and trust in research, it is also noteworthy that the increase in research volume has also brought about concerning trends that may affect the validity and accuracy of the results.

Research by the Journal of Ethics also revealed that processes that verify the accuracy and quality of results can be driven by an unhealthy research culture that prioritizes publishing results quickly rather than honest and scientifically backed data.

As we look to the future, we must create a research culture based on good practices, quality, transparency, and ethics, led by researchers, clinicians and decision makers who are able to implement proven and evidence-based research methodologies.

Closing the information gap through accessibility

Rapid digitalization across the region in the past few years has presented the opportunity to streamline healthcare practices, specifically through development of tools that ensure clinicians have access to evidence-based clinical information, even from the most rural of regions. It has lowered the barrier for clinicians to access reliable medical information, which ultimately reduces the potential mental load that retraining can have on them.

Today, clinicians can gain access to the latest curated clinical information through platforms within Elsevier’s ClinicalKey suite that provides streamlined, evidence-based practices on digital web-based platforms. The usage of such tools will minimize the need for clinicians to scour through large volumes of literature, reducing the information overload and facilitating their clinical decision-making process. This ultimately helps with the standardization of clinical practices through adherence of good clinical practices backed by solid research.

Encouraging a research-positive culture in health and care organizations is important to give clinicians wider access to clinical research and improve patient care and treatment outcomes for patients.

Vision Ahead:

It is undeniable that the last two years has seen to a shift in attitudes towards clinical research, propagated by the global pandemic which necessitated this motion. There is a greater understanding of the importance clinical and scientific data communication, and more importantly, the role of evidence-based research to improve public health and reduce the burden of emerging diseases.

Specifically in APAC, which is one of the most diverse regions in the world, to mobilize and implement a culture of evidence, we must take advantage of large amounts of scientific data and respond accordingly in a customized manner.

Ultimately, a consolidated effort is needed to accelerate adoption of research-based caregiving across all levels, from updating of healthcare systems, training of clinicians to community health education interventions.

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