

Opinion Leaders

What:

An opinion leader, frequently called an educationally influential, is an individual who communicates information and influences practice change through interactions with peers. Some authors differentiate between formal opinion leaders who occupy roles of responsibility and informal opinion leaders.

Purpose:

Recognizing the role that opinion leaders can play in facilitating knowledge transfer and practice change, there has been growing interest in the formalization of opinion leader roles and their recruitment for particular initiatives.

Research on Opinion Leaders:

- The seminal work by Hiss et al. demonstrated that opinion leaders exhibit three types of characteristics: strong communication skills, knowledge expertise, and a high level of humanistic concern. These studies involved primary care and community hospital physicians.
- In a recent Cochrane review of randomized controlled trials of opinion leaders, the overall median adjusted risk difference (ARD) was 0.10 representing a 10% absolute decrease in non-compliance in the intervention group. The authors concluded that the use of local opinion leaders can successfully promote evidence-based practice but the feasibility of its widespread use remains uncertain.
- Recommendations have been made to strengthen the construct of opinion leaders using the original Hiss method, although recent studies with specialist physicians have questioned the value of these criteria for identifying opinion leaders in this population.
- Investigation into the role of opinion leaders has raised the following questions:
 - Does the effectiveness of an opinion leader change when the role and activities become formalized?
 - In what circumstances and how do opinion leaders influence their peers?
 - What type of opinion leader training and support is necessary?
 - What is the influence of individuals identified as content experts compared to those exhibiting the traditional Hiss criteria?

Resources:

- Opinion leader outcomes studies overview www.ktp.utoronto.ca/whatisktp/tools/opinionLeader
- Power point presentation "Opinion leaders: using educational influentials to change practice", Dr. Dave Davis www.ktp.utoronto.ca/whatisktp/tools/opinionLeader
- Guidelines Advisory Committee Checklist "Ten things opinion leaders can do" www.ktp.utoronto.ca/whatisktp/tools/opinionLeader
- Continuing Medical Education, University of Toronto, opinion leader bibliography <http://www.cme.utoronto.ca/rdrb/bibopinionleader.asp>
- University of Toronto KTP knowledge translation glossary www.ktp.utoronto.ca/whatisktp/glossary

KTP RESEARCH DIGEST #5, 2005: What are the attributes of opinion leaders in surgery?
www.ktp.utoronto.ca/events/archives/researchDigest/

References:

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