

Press release Austrian Public Health Institute (Gesundheit Österreich GmbH, GÖG)

Bridging the gap between evidence and policy

Bad Hofgastein 4.10.2018 – Evidence matters for good political decision-making. However, there is increasing recognition that health policy is not adequately informed by best available evidence and research findings may not be incorporated in political decision-making. The latter is characterised by complex processes that are “wicked” in nature so that policymakers are often not able to consider best evidence. How researchers, knowledge brokers and policymakers find a common language and come to evidence informed solutions, was discussed at the European Health Forum Gastein today. The workshop was jointly organised by the Austrian Public Health Institute, Gesundheit Österreich GmbH (GÖG) and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies.

“Policymakers are already swimming in white papers, reports and studies”, stated keynote speaker Paul Cairney, professor of politics and public policy at the University of Stirling, UK. As it is impossible to consider all evidence, they would employ two short cuts: “rational”, pursuing clear goals and prioritizing certain kinds and sources of information, and “irrational”, drawing on emotions, gut feelings, deeply held beliefs, habits and familiarity, make decisions quickly. “Scientists can play an important role as sifters, synthesizers, and analyzers”, says Paul Cairney. For them it helps to be persistent, to develop networks and to find the right moment and language to provide the evidence.

“For politicians it is crucial, that information finds them in time and in a format that can be immediately used in negotiations and shared with the public” added former Slovenian Minister of Health, Milojka Kolar Celarc. Short and well prepared policy briefs including economic analysis which are developed by a reliable research or knowledge brokering institution could contribute well to the uptake of evidence.

“Despite effective knowledge translation mechanisms, research evidence remains but one of the factors influencing policy processes” stated Tanja Kuchenmüller, from the WHO Regional Office for Europe. A lot of other factors have an impact on political decision-making. The Evidence-informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) provides global evidence for local decision-making and promotes the systematic and transparent use of evidence in national health policy-making across the region.

Rob Cook, Clinical Director with the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) healthcare practice thinks that “policymakers are interested in the diversity of possible views and in the inclusion of multiple types of evidence”. Complex topics could lead to overly technical reports, but key information could also be lost in attempts to oversimplify. “Therefore the EIU has developed ‘white papers’ as an awareness or advocacy tool that helps its readers understand an issue, make a decision or solve a problem” emphasized Cook.

"Evidence-informed decision-making should not be questioned" underlined Brigitte Piso, Head of the Austrian National Institute for Quality in Healthcare (BIQG). "But in the policy context, a lot of aspects have to be taken into consideration. Therefore, in an ideal decision-making process an appraisal committee representing different stakeholders, views and values will finally sum up the recommendation" she stated.

Speakers:

Paul Cairney, Professor of Politics and Public Policy, University of Stirling, UK

Milojka Kolar Celarc, Former Minister of Health, Republic of Slovenia

Tanja Kuchenmüller, Unit leader, Knowledge Management, Evidence and Research for Policy-Making (KER); Division of Information, Evidence, Research and Innovation (DIR) at the WHO Regional Office for Europe

Rob Cook, Clinical Director with the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) healthcare practice

Brigitte Piso, Head of the Austrian National Institute for Quality in Healthcare (BIQG), Austrian Public Health Institute GÖG

Facilitators:

Josep Figueras, Director, European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies

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