Background: Government policy and national practice guidelines have created an increasing need for autism services to adopt an evidence-based approach. Yet many users of autism services, practitioners and policy-makers do not have sufficient opportunity to access or evaluate research evidence. The task of knowledge translation also raises key questions about how research knowledge will be accepted, understood and used by non-researchers.

How do we narrow the gap?

Overall aim
We aimed to develop the Autism Research Policy Practice Hub (Autism RPP Hub), as an open-access knowledge sharing platform. The hub aims to champion the use of research in policy and practice and facilitate co-production of knowledge.

Objectives for design and development stage of the Autism RPP Hub
Offline engagement with non-academic professionals to identify user needs
(a) individual consultation with practitioners, stakeholders and policy consultants
(b) larger off line seminar events (talks to third sector and government audiences).
(c) qualitative interviews with 8 practitioners, and user trials
(d) a large scale online survey (n=683) of researchers and practitioners/policy workers

Introduction

Methods

Figure 1: RPP Hub- Development work (month 1-9)

Online Survey

Participants: A google survey was completed by 683 participants (263 practice/policy; 422 research). There were 147 (35%) from USA, 137 (32%) Australia/NZ; 112 (27%) Europe including 16% from UK.

Design: Question content and response options was informed by data from earlier initial qualitative interviews (n=8 practitioners).

Procedure: Participants completed a researcher or practitioner version of the questionnaire. They were asked about (a) whether they engage with researchers and vice-versa (b) what they thought would help the increase research knowledge for practice (c) how they currently source information.

Online Survey Results

1. Current level of engagement

2. What would help to promote research knowledge be beneficial for practitioners?

3. How do you currently keep up to date with information in autism?

Developing a Research-Policy-Practice Hub for ASD

The Autism RPP Hub was launched online at the end of Sept 2013. The priorities of non-academic practice and policy professionals reported in the survey have been built into its design and provision of resources. See examples on this web link:

http://www.autismrpphub.org

Regular features include; News, articles, research methods toolkit, international practice guidelines. Online events included: Diagnostic methods online, the Policy Conversation, Employment Hot Topic (these are still available online). Future plans should aim at sharing knowledge through collaboration and co-production.

Conclusion

The survey results showed that academic researchers prioritise different knowledge sources (e.g. academic journals vs CPD) to update information. They have a different view from practitioners and policy workers about their level of engagement with the non-academic community, believing they are more engaged. However, policy and practice communities are keen to (a) engage with research, (b) access research materials and (c) learn to apply evidence-based research methods themselves.

While the design of the Autism RPP Hub attempted to be responsive to user needs, evaluation of useability and effectiveness must be ongoing and adaptive to users. Researchers should be responsive to iterative cycles of user need analysis and help to identify what works for whom. Barriers identified from qualitative interviews were not only access, but also time. Scientific language and statistics, practicality and interest/trust were also barriers that were raised. These need to be reviewed and knowledge change monitored in both researchers and non-researchers.

Further work is needed to pinpoint the mismatch of view between researchers and non-researchers regarding their level of engagement with the other community. To overcome this mismatch, researchers need to work more closely in face to face interaction with other professionals to find common ground and ensure future co-production of knowledge.

Outcomes

Autism RPP

This project was funded by the ESRC and the Welsh Government. Contact Prof. Sue Leekam, LeekamSR@Cardiff.ac.uk for further information.

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