

## CHSRF at Forefront of Knowledge Brokering

Since its creation in 1997, the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF) has promoted knowledge transfer as an integral part of its mission to support evidence-based decision-making in the organization, management and delivery of health services in Canada. Throughout its mandate, the foundation has been at the forefront of this work, using innovative approaches to get healthcare-related research into the hands of those who need it most – health system managers and health system policymakers.

While the foundation's formative years focused on building research capacity and developing new research programs, its strategy has deepened. Five years after the foundation was launched, an international review panel called upon it to focus more strongly on knowledge transfer and supporting decision-makers. As part of that shift, the foundation launched a program to promote and support a critically important activity called knowledge brokering.

Knowledge brokering is about bringing people together, building relationships and sharing ideas and evidence that help healthcare stakeholders do their jobs better. It is the human connection that makes knowledge transfer – the movement of knowledge from one place or group of people to another – more effective.

Knowledge brokering draws researchers and decision-makers out of their silos. It helps them to see beyond their immediate boundaries so they can collaborate and communicate to arrive at evidence-based decisions in healthcare. It is, therefore, entirely a third-party role in the decision-making process.

There has been much discussion about who a knowledge broker is – what that person's job entails and what characteristics he or she has. While it depends on the organization for which the broker is acting, the basic skill set includes solid technical knowledge, strong communication skills, an ability to negotiate and resolve conflicts, and a talent for facilitation. The knowledge broker brings researchers and decision-makers together, facilitating their interaction so they are able to better understand each other's goals and professional cultures, influence each other's work, forge new partnerships and use research-based evidence.

Knowledge brokering has often been unrecognized and unplanned. The foundation's knowledge-brokering program has therefore worked for three years to identify and link knowledge brokers, give recognition to their role, provide resources and evaluate the effectiveness of knowledge brokering.

To support its knowledge-brokering program, in 2002 the foundation held seven regional meetings across Canada on the subject. It launched this national consultation, which considered input from 200 experts in the field, not only to identify the various functions and processes associated with knowledge brokering, but also to examine the roles of those who do it.

Through this process, the foundation discovered that knowledge brokering needs support and acknowledgment to reach the critical mass necessary to become a widespread practice.

A national meeting in Toronto followed the consultation process in which participants examined specific actions the foundation could take to promote the use of knowledge brokering in Canada's healthcare system. Those actions formed the three pillars of the foundation's knowledge-brokering program: networking, professional development and evaluation.

To meet these commitments, the foundation designed a suite of professional development opportunities that includes a brokering e-newsletter, a specific portal and a library of documents on its website that pertain to knowledge brokering, and a list of training resources for knowledge brokers. The foundation hosted two national knowledge-brokering workshops, one each in Toronto and Montreal. A third workshop is scheduled for October 2004 in Vancouver. The second day of each workshop is devoted entirely to professional development.

Furthermore, the foundation is embarking on a project to create a desktop application for knowledge brokers in Canada. The application will provide brokers with a tool to nourish their burgeoning community of practice and connect with the most comprehensive and relevant databases. The foundation is also constructing a database of brokers to help build a strong, extensive, and lasting community of practice.

The knowledge-brokering program also puts much emphasis on evaluation. Indeed, the most common message received from workshops and the national consultation process was that the foundation should undertake a program to evaluate whether brokering is a manageable proposition. To meet that need, the foundation is calling for proposals from individual or collaborating groups to design a knowledge-brokering demonstration site. Successful applicants can put their brokering skills to the test as long as they match the funding provided by the foundation. The foundation will evaluate the impact of the projects.

To qualify, the projects must promote brokering's function of encouraging evidence-based decision-making by bringing people together and helping them engage in collaborative problem-solving. And they must be new projects — the foundation will not fund established programs or activities.

For more information, please visit the foundation's website at [www.chsrf.ca/brokering/index\\_e.php](http://www.chsrf.ca/brokering/index_e.php). The call for applications is available at [www.chsrf.ca/brokering/pdf/call\\_2004\\_e.pdf](http://www.chsrf.ca/brokering/pdf/call_2004_e.pdf).