The evidence debate

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Evaluating evidence for public health interventions

This issue presents an excellent article from Australia addressing the criteria for evaluating evidence for public health interventions. This article should be read within the context of the evidence debate that occupied the last decade of the 20th century and continues into the present. The origins of this debate are found in a clinical medicine tradition of public health practitioners who sought to establish a dialogue on the means by which evidence criteria has taken much public health evaluation down a path implying a particular interpretation of the evidence debate, that is necessary to demonstrate what constitutes evidence and to engage in a vital debate, that is necessary to demonstrate what constitutes evidence and to engage in a dialogue on the means by which evidence criteria has taken much public health evaluation down a path implying scientific rigor. Evidence as a topic may also be debatable, but arguably most public health practitioners feel a strong need to explore their actions or demonstrate to others that their field of application is one with tangible benefits to public health. Still, there are many, particularly in health promotion who believe that “evidence”, the very word, is inappropriate in evaluating much of public health practice.

What is most useful about the evidence debate is how it has served to broaden the discussion on evaluation of community-based public health interventions. Today, perhaps more than ever, public health practitioners are aware of the social and cultural context in which they carry out their work. This awareness applies at all levels of society. At the local level we are sensitised to local needs and public understandings of what constitutes evidence-based medicine. Gradually this debate has been extended to public health, health promotion and community-based public health interventions. The assumption of many in public health is that this is an important, vital debate, that is necessary to demonstrate what constitutes evidence and therefore proof that public health interventions are effective. The application of evidence criteria has taken much public health evaluation down a path implying scientific rigor. Evidence as a topic may be debatable, but arguably most public health practitioners feel a strong need to explore their actions or demonstrate to others that their field of application is one with tangible benefits to public health. Still, there are many, particularly in health promotion who believe that “evidence”, the very word, is inappropriate in evaluating much of public health practice.

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REFERENCES


