

“The challenges of sharing knowledge across boundaries: tales from an
NIHR Knowledge Mobilisation Research Fellow”

**Dr Vicky Ward, Lecturer in primary care at the Leeds Institute of Health Sciences,
University of Leeds**

Tuesday 3rd March, 2015

These are summary notes to accompany the presentation made by the above named speaker, as one of the knowledge exchange seminar series organised by the Fuse knowledge exchange group and is to be read in conjunction with the slide set, available on the Fuse website.

Vicky Ward opened the seminar by reminding the audience of the main points from a ‘brief and imperfect’ history of knowledge mobilisation. This started with the evidence based practice movement in the 1990s and the in 1997 the then New Labour government adopted the mantra of “what matters is what works” and the diffusion of innovations became important. Slide no 2 depicts how the subject area developed over the 2000s leading to a series of reports, initiatives and strategies. The NIHR (National Institute for Health Research) was one of the products of this expanding field as were the establishment of CLAHRCs (Collaboration in Leadership for Applied Health Research and Care) and, more recently the setting up of AHSNs (Academic Health Science Networks). Over this whole period there has been a continuing rise of knowledge mobilisation research and an increasing volume of literature, ever- more models to illustrate knowledge mobilisation and an explosion of terminology. For example, Ferlie (2012) found over 600 papers on the subject, and Davies (2014), 71 reviews of knowledge mobilisation literature. During her own work, Vicky had found 28 models (2009), but by 2010 Mitchell found 47 and Tabak in 2012 (61). More recently Vicky had repeated her earlier work and found another 49 models. In relation to the terminology, McKibbin found 100 different terms to describe knowledge mobilisation.

The field is diverse from which three main theoretical views of knowledge mobilisation may be identified:

- Implementation Science – from the standpoint of direct adoption of research
- Process – a knowledge exchange process leading implementation
- Mechanistic – a result of co-production

However these theories miss two main areas in particular:

- Practice based knowledge mobilisation – how is this knowledge learned and stored?
- Tacit knowledge mobilisation

Vicky Ward moved in to discuss the project highlighted in the seminar title. The subject area which she was involved in, to study knowledge mobilisation was integrated care. The teams involved were motivated to improve on how they share their knowledge for a number of reasons, including a history of poor coordination, the fact that service users can be a very distressed group, the propensity for unnecessary duplication, and the increasing financial

burden of providing care itself. The solutions to these issues were generally seen to be about integrating care and creating or encouraging existing inter-professional teams. However the inter-professional working depended on sharing knowledge including sharing professional values and vision, different perspectives on service users and their needs and connections with networks beyond the team members.

A diagram was shown which identified the roles of the people in the community team and their interconnections (see Slide no 7). The purpose of the team was for it to be presented with case management issues, and then decide the response, which would be the point to bring in knowledge mobilisation approaches. Two questions came to the fore: How does knowledge get shared across health and social care boundaries? Secondly, "How can it be improved?" (Improved here refers to the process of knowledge sharing being facilitated).

A diagram was shown of the project design (see Slide no 9). The research started with team meetings (Vicky is currently working with 2 out of 13 teams in the geographical area). The teams were observed and notes taken, particularly looking for 'sticking points', for example, circular conversations or times where the discussion 'goes dead'. The study design involved identifying recurring problems or topics where the team struggled to share knowledge. When the time came for Vicky to start offering assistance (facilitating knowledge sharing), she found that some of the topics had become less pressing for the team and others had taken over. Consequently the method was changed to spot points in the discussion where the team had stalled and to intervene with a set of questions designed to help team members share knowledge (see Slide no 10). Questions include 'has anyone else tried to address this problem'? The intention is to prompt the team members to find out what other team members (or other teams) know about the problem and how it might be solved. The interventions were deliberately low key and at a very early stage, but, nonetheless had so far seemed to have the effect of changing the conversation.

Questions were then invited from the audience, at this point in the presentation.

- A question was asked about how long Vicky was with the teams. The response was that there was an initial two months spent getting to know the teams by observation and general informal conversations to understand how team members related to one another. At the same time, as the researcher Vicky was open to questions from the start. Developing a good relationship may not be time dependent. In the longer term one aim would be to make the knowledge mobilisation post redundant because it would be no longer needed in a culture where knowledge was shared and acted on.
- A discussion took place about the time taken to formulate questions, and the use of 'stock' questions to re-start group thinking where it had got stuck.
- A discussion also arose about data analysis. Vicky made the point that it was difficult to separate her area of research about knowledge sharing from being perceived as having a role in solving the immediate problem. Sometimes courage was needed to ask questions which would free up the discussion. In the end, from a theoretical view point, the work was partly ethnography, action research and participatory research. In some respects the learning developed as the project unfolded, which had parallels with leadership theory. In this approach who the leader is, is important and behaviours then become significant. This then

progressed to what individual team members could actually do. Vicky had perceived a keenness for lessons learned (by her as part of the research) to be passed on to other teams in the local area, but at this stage of the research these needed to be undisclosed because they were untested and unconfirmed and could influence the involvement of other teams as the research progressed

- It was noted that a community matron was due to move between the two teams which provided an opportunity to see if knowledge was “transported”. In addition the teams were not stable and different people meeting each time added to the dynamic.

Three stories were then presented. Vicky used these to illustrate the different types of knowledge and perspectives held by people within the teams and how this is sometimes shared (The case of Mrs Oates); the challenges posed by different professional and cultural worldviews when trying to get research governance approval (The language of Threat and Opportunity); the risk of knowledge mobilisation research (and knowledge mobilisers) being re-appropriated to serve short-term organisational goals (The risks of being “here to help”).

Observations and questions about the three stories were invited.

- In relation to the third story, Vicky was asked about what the organisations were getting from her. The response was that there were lots of players involved and different viewpoints but that the teams were the real customers. The key benefit was that the teams were being facilitated to share their knowledge to develop different conversations. She had noted that the teams understood the issues well, whereas middle management sometimes didn’t, having a different outlook. An audience member suggested that sometimes different strategies were needed for different organisational levels.
- Vicky was asked about whether her role was as researcher or facilitator or perhaps something else. She said that she saw herself as the researcher asking “constructively clueless” questions, whilst being independent of the immediate issue. Vicky commented that she really valued the comments of two lay researchers who she had involved in the project to make observations of Vicky herself. They had recently pointed out the importance of Vicky’s knowledge and perspective to the teams.
- Vicky was asked about the outcome of the Mrs Oates case, above. She said that the comment about her re-taking control had stopped the conversation but that she didn’t know the outcome for the individual case. It had been included in the seminar to illustrate different world views and the scope in fact shown for people to share knowledge well and to listen to each other on some occasions.

AR/VW – 16th March 2015