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JACR Commentaries on Translating Research into Practice: Introduction

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Recently, the National Institute of Health launched the "Roadmap for Medical Research" initiative, which is geared to foster translational research (Zerhouni, 2005). The goal of this initiative is to translate the "remarkable scientific innovations we are witnessing into health gains for the nation" (p. 1621). Although this is a new approach in medicine, since 1998 communication scholars have advocated the need for translational practices. The decision of the *JACR* editor, Tim Sellnow, to publish a series of Commentaries provides an occasion to assess how our discipline has embraced the spirit of translational research 10 years after our first introduction to the concept. The four commentaries to be published in this series highlight the translational research advances made in our discipline.

From the 1998 NCA pre-conference that introduced the concept of "translating research into practice," the 1999 *JACR* special issue on translational research, the many programs found in the 2001 Western States Communication Association conference dedicated to the theme of research into practice, the 2002 WSCA presidential address, and invited essays in *WJC* in 1994–1997 on defining evidence, we have grown in our understanding and recognition of the critical nature translational research plays in our world today (Petronio, 1998, 1999, 2002). We have become more sophisticated in the way we think about research translation. We recognize that in order to address everyday problems we need to go beyond the knowledge discovery of the basic research enterprise to interpret and apply research outcomes in an effort to develop effective practices for the betterment of everyday life. Progressing from knowledge discovery to translating results through interpreting, decoding, and deciphering helps locate executable practices that reflect the best kind of knowledge utilization (Petronio, 1999). The most important aspect of translational research is that we yield more than application: we create ways in which to implement new systems, procedures, or routines predicated on research findings that are geared toward developing functional practices to improve our lives.

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As we have come to understand the development and utilization of research into practice, we have identified several critical pathways necessary in the translational process. The first pathway emphasizes an obligation to identify problems that are most likely to benefit from translational research projects. The second pathway requires us to remember that in addressing a target audience's desire for translational information, we must first assess a fit between need and research application. The third pathway highlights the need to redesign aspects of the research enterprise to accomplish translation. In this critical pathway, we need to consider current definitions of evidence and reformulate them to achieve relevant translational research goals (Petronio, 2002). The fourth pathway concerns the process of converting translational research findings into practices that afford individuals direct benefits from these research endeavors. The fifth pathway focuses on the delivery system—that is, on developing ways to bring information most effectively to those in need of scientific knowledge. When delivery systems work, they are helpful in providing translatable information. However, we have seen examples of systems that do not provide viable avenues to take advantage of translated research.

These five pathways are important to achieve the goals of translating research into practice. Of these pathways, the need to reconceptualize how we define evidence to directly achieve translational research goals seems the most pressing. However, one attempt to define translational validity measures is found in the 2002 WSCA presidential address (Petronio, 2002). The five types of translational validity presented there underscore the challenge of transforming research into practice. To achieve *experience validity*, that is, accounting for the lived experiences of those being studied, translational researchers should locate people's positions as they enact communication. The lived experience is more than perceptual; it is housed within the person's history, personal practices, and culture. To achieve translation, we must position our data within this larger framework. Through *responsive validity*, translators are obligated to be receptive to the human condition and focus on how communication influences and is influenced. Through *relevance validity*, those aspects of communication that are significant to any given population must be understood within the context of interactions. Translation practices are formulated out of understanding the significance of these contexts. Through *cultural validity*, translators can only successfully yield functional practices by taking into account the role of customs, routines, and values within the cultural context. Finally, through *tolerance validity*, where translators recognize and honor existing patterns when they bring research into practice, researchers are more able to transform findings into meaningful outcomes to better the everyday life.

Thus the journey from knowledge generation to knowledge utilization, with the goal of establishing evidenced-based practices geared to address a need, challenges our field to rethink the meaning of our research enterprise. The discipline of communication can make significant contributions to meeting the need to provide evidenced-based practices, not only in health but in all other areas of communication research. The commentaries we present in this series issue a call to embrace a very real 21st-century need.

References

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