

Editorial

The importance of evaluating performance to understand changes

Editorial Decision 1 April 2019; Accepted 2 April 2019

Recently, the journal published two papers that described findings on the evaluation of performance in different clinical conditions and settings but with the same goal: to give explanation to findings observed after the placement systemic interventions or established programs in real world environments.

The first one from Aron *et al.* [1] explores the issue of the results of fighting overtreatment in diabetic patients, resulting in undertreatment as an unintended consequence and haven't used balancing measures to detect so during the implementation of the strategy. The second one from Hillen *et al.* [2] describes the frequency of appropriate usage of medication in a vulnerable population such as the ones in residential care, which shows huge gaps in adequate use.

The clinical situations described in the two studies are not the main point to comment on. The case I like to highlight is the importance of evaluating performance to detect opportunities for improvement. Both studies take profit from the retrospective review of administrative databases usually available in mature health systems as frequently observed in developed countries. This is huge asset and is a cornerstone of health services research, what constitutes the base for further research to confirm or reject hypothesis to and develop solutions in reaction to problems [3].

As the authors mention in their discussions and raised by others, measuring is the key principle to understand what gaps are still present and also to identify unaverted harm that may arise as consequence of the interventions we enroll patients in [4]. Nevertheless, interpretation of studies based on retrospective analysis from clinical registries must always have certain precautions considering limitations of the data collections process and potential biases. There are surely lessons to be learnt but having in place concurrent measurement may help practitioners not to depend on delayed interpretation of data to make corrections in way care is delivered what is not unfortunately a common case [5].

Days ago, I heard from Don Berwick the expression 'putting measurement on a diet' stating the importance of meaningful

measures which should lead to meaningful actions [6]. Is critical then to find the right fit not to be overrun by the effort of measuring or neglect the importance of never stop looking for opportunities to improve. It's clearly a never-ending story that will continue to occupy us.

References

1. Aron DC, Tseng C-L, Soroka O *et al.* Balancing measures: identifying unintended consequences of diabetes quality performance measures in patients at high risk for hypoglycemia. *Int J Qual Health Care* 2018;31: 246–251. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30053046>.
2. Hillen JB, Vitry A, Caughey GE. Medication-related quality of care in residential aged care: an Australian experience. *Int J Qual Heal Care* 2018;31:298–306. <https://academic.oup.com/intqhc/advance-article/doi/10.1093/intqhc/mzy193/5085063>.
3. Jansen ACM, Van Aalst-Cohen ES, Hutten BA *et al.* Guidelines were developed for data collection from medical records for use in retrospective analyses. *J Clin Epidemiol* 2005;58:269–74. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15718116>.
4. Toma M, Dreischulte T, Gray NM *et al.* A balanced approach to identifying, prioritising and evaluating all potential consequences of quality improvement: modified Delphi study. *BMJ Open* 2019;9:e023890. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30904844>.
5. Haugland H, Uleberg O, Klepstad P *et al.* Quality measurement in physician-staffed emergency medical services: a systematic literature review. *Int J Qual Health care* 2019;31:2–10. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29767795>.
6. Berwick. Conference Presentation Europe Forum IHI-BMJ 2019. <http://internationalforum.bmj.com/glasgow/2018/09/20/keynote-three-session-to-be-announced/>.

EZEQUIEL GARCIA-ELORRIO

Director Health Care Quality and Patient Safety Institute for Clinical Effectiveness and Health Policy, Buenos Aires, Argentina;
E-mail: egarciaelorio@iecs.org.ar