The impact of the National Institute for Health Research Health Technology Assessment programme, 2003–13: a multimethod evaluation

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Plain English summary

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What was the problem/question?

The Health Technology Assessment (HTA) programme aims to fund high-quality research that is useful for clinicians, policy-makers and managers in the UK NHS. However, the impact of the HTA programme over the last 10 years has not yet been ascertained.

What did we do?

We reviewed the impact of the HTA programme, from 2003 to 2013, on patients, health policy, clinical practice, the research system, industry and the economy. We collected data through (1) qualitative interviews with representatives of the programme and organisations that either use or conduct HTA research; (2) an assessment of how academics use HTA-funded research; (3) a survey of all HTA grant holders; and (4) in-depth case studies of HTA-funded research projects.

What did we find?

The HTA programme has an impact on patients and clinical practice in the NHS. It funds high-quality research and plays an important role in supporting clinical research. The programme has helped change attitudes to research and has contributed to the increasing use of evidence in the NHS. Research from the programme is also widely used internationally.

What does this mean?

To increase the programme’s impact, it could provide targeted funding to get important results into clinical practice, and more complete information on the cost of introducing new treatments. It should continue to maintain relationships with researchers and policy-makers, and improve the monitoring of the impact of patient and public involvement in research and the transparency of how it makes funding decisions.
Criteria for inclusion in the Health Technology Assessment journal

Reports are published in Health Technology Assessment (HTA) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HTA programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

Reviews in Health Technology Assessment are termed ‘systematic’ when the account of the search appraisal and synthesis methods (to minimise biases and random errors) would, in theory, permit the replication of the review by others.

HTA programme

The HTA programme, part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), was set up in 1993. It produces high-quality research information on the effectiveness, costs and broader impact of health technologies for those who use, manage and provide care in the NHS. Health technologies’ are broadly defined as all interventions used to promote health, prevent and treat disease, and improve rehabilitation and long-term care.

The journal is indexed in NHS Evidence via its abstracts included in MEDLINE and its Technology Assessment Reports inform National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance. HTA research is also an important source of evidence for National Screening Committee (NSC) policy decisions.

For more information about the HTA programme please visit the website: http://www.nets.nihr.ac.uk/programmes/hta

This report

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