

A formative evaluation of Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC): institutional entrepreneurship for service innovation

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Plain English summary

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We examined the role of institutional entrepreneurship, through which individuals and groups transform existing practices to promote sustainable change, in transferring and translating scientific research into practice. We carried out detailed case studies in four Collaborations for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRCs) – new kinds of research/health service collaboratives in England. We engaged in both qualitative case studies and quantitative social network analysis methods, to understand the development of CLAHRCs as a kind of translational research initiative. Drawing on the qualitative data we show that the founding conditions of CLAHRCs, in terms of local context and the key focal actors, played an important role in shaping the initial design of the CLAHRCs. The initial CLAHRC designs then shaped the subsequent roll-out of the CLAHRCs, acting to lock-in CLAHRCs to specific paths of future development. The effect of the lock-in was moderated by a desire from CLAHRC actors to learn from one another. In addition, we developed five different archetype models of knowledge translation, and provide insights into the critical institutional work and leadership challenges associated with the different CLAHRC archetypes. Finally, the quantitative research highlighted systematic variations in actors' ability to bridge the research–practice boundary; however, the CLAHRC initiative has led to the development of more relationships that span the research–practice divide. Overall, we contribute to understanding of translational research initiatives by offering the clear guidance that strategies for change are not built independently from the context in which they are embedded.

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