The 2015 JCEHP Award for Excellence in Research

Betsy Williams, PhD, MPH

The Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions Award for Excellence in Research is presented annually and recognizes exemplary research works in health professions education. The 2015 award has been given to Lisa Cicutto, RN, PhD, ACNP (Cert), CAE; Meg B. Dingae, MHSA, CCMEP; and Esther L. Langmack, MD, FCCP, CCMEP for their article Improving Asthma Care in Rural Primary Care Practices: A Performance Improvement Project.1

Twenty-three original research articles were published in Volume 34 of the journal, making them eligible for the award. Articles were diverse in target audience (physicians, physiotherapists, interprofessional teams, doctors in difficulty, and deployed physicians), course format and delivery system (online, live, printed, Performance Improvement CME [PI-CME], and point of care learning), competency areas targeted, medical conditions targeted, study design (survey, systematic review, and randomized control trial), and outcome measure (commitment to change statements, empathy score, mindfulness score, guideline adherence, chart reviews, attitudes, barriers, self-efficacy, and autonomic arousal). There was an international representation of authors (Australia, Brazil, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand, Nigeria, Spain, and Switzerland) encompassing multiple health professions.

A rigorous review process was established. Each article was assigned to three reviewers. Reviewers were recused from rating articles on which they were an author and were asked to report any other potential conflicts of interest. Reviewers were asked to judge each article on clarity of writing, literature review, and problem statement, strength of research design, quality of instrumentation/data collection/analysis, discussion/conclusion, and the importance of the topic to CME/Continuing Professional Development (CPD). From this broad and diverse state of articles, the selection committee used a two-stage final review process leading to the identification of the winning article. The finalists were determined based on seven criteria including a problem statement, strength of research design, quality of instrumentation, results, conclusions, clarity of writing, and importance to the field.

From this second round of deliberation, two finalists emerged:

- Williams BW, Kessler HA, and Williams MV. Relationship Among Practice Change, Motivation, and Self-Efficacy. I and my colleagues Harold Kessler and Michael Williams were honored to have authored one of the finalist articles.2 We studied a number of intervening variables potentially related to CME effectiveness. Specifically, we examined the relationship among self-efficacy, motivation to change, and intent to implement CME activity learning. Self-efficacy was found to be a powerful second-order variable related to the formulation of intent to change practice subsequent to a CME activity. We suggested that methods of addressing activity participants’ sense of self-efficacy might be important in improving the efficacy of CME. One reviewer commented, “As CME providers, our role is to positively impact physician behavior so that we can improve patient care and outcomes.” Another commented, “Small sample size, but important deductions about motivation and self-efficacy, if we can increase self-efficacy, actual behavior may follow.” Another reviewed noted,

  First-rate research article about a critical topic related to CME effectiveness and how to improve it. I rarely read this level of sophistication in research articles in JCEHP. This article sets a very high standard. It may well be ‘over the head’ of some CME practitioners, but it is based on proper theory, and research methods that we want all practitioners, and researchers to use. It would be an excellent choice for the award.

- Cicutto L, Dingae MB, and Langmack EL, Improving Asthma Care in Rural Primary Care Practices: A Performance Improvement Project. Lisa Cicutto and colleagues1 undertook an ambitious and extensive primary care, asthma-focused, performance improvement project. The program was provided to a six-county, rural-frontier region in Colorado to determine whether asthma care practices could be enhanced to become concordant with evidence-based asthma care guidelines. Their study used a pre-post, quasi-experimental design. They delivered a complex, multifaceted intervention to multidisciplinary primary care teams in practices serving children and adults with asthma. Intervention elements included face-to-face trainings, clinical support tools, patient education materials, a Web site, and clinic visits. Performance improvement and behavior change indicators were collected through chart audits and surveys from the entire health care team. Significant improvements in all indicators of quality asthma care provision to adults and children with asthma were noted. One reviewer noted, “Great project and research topic for PI-CME. The authors identified statistically significant improvements as a result of training interventions and chart reviews.” Although another noted, “Excellent work showing the power of CME to

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drive patient level outcome changes.” The article was described as very important “in terms of population health in the region studied.” It was also cited as important as the authors, “ran into many significant barriers and still accomplished their goals. The article is important in helping others navigate the difficulties of PI-CME and improve outcomes. This article shows perseverance in both doing the work, writing up, and presenting the work.”

As Chair of the awards committee and an author of one of the finalist articles, I invited Dave Davis to make an independent recommendation on which article should receive the award. In making his recommendation, he noted that “the two articles [are] very different, but highly important studies for CME—one internal and psychologically focused, and one entirely externally focused.” In the end, his recommendation was to give the award to Cicutto et al. He noted that

Their article expresses, in an elegant study design, many of the key features of the advances in CME/CPD over the last decade. It targets an underserviced population with a high rate of morbidity, uses a multifaceted and interconnected set of interventions, uses parameters developed in evidence-based guidelines, and uses a set of objective and subjective measures to assess the impact of the program. It sets a gold standard in many ways for this kind of study and acts as an exemplar for CME/CPD professionals and scholars.

The recommendation for the award winning article was then forwarded to JCEHP’s Editor, Curtis Olson, who affirmed and accepted the decision.

On behalf of Research Committee and the members of the Selection Committee congratulation to Lisa and her colleagues as the recipients of the 2015 JCEHP Award for Excellence in Research. I also thank the Alliance for Continuing Education in the Health Professions, Society for Academic Continuing Medical Education, and the Association for Hospital Medical Education for their ongoing support of research that enhances theory and practice in continuing education in the health professions.

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REFERENCES