

KI. Keynote Lecture I

Assessing the payback from health research: the development and application of a flexible and comprehensive approach



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Prof Buxton has been actively involved in research on the economics of health and medical care and on broader aspects of health service policy for over thirty years. After working as an Economic Adviser at the Department of Health and Social Security in London from 1978-1980, he has been based at Brunel University where he has built up HERG into one of the leading University-based units for health economic evaluation research.

The main focus of his research has been the economic evaluation of health technologies on which he has undertaken extensive studies, both applied and methodological, particularly for the UK Department of Health and the NHS. However a major theme in the last few years has been work developing and applying methods to assess the impact of, or 'payback' from health-related research and to better understand the processes by which research gets translated into changes in policy, practice and health outcomes. This work has been influential in the UK and internationally as the assessment of the impact of research has become increasingly important to governments and funding agencies.

If healthcare is to be evidence-based, then clearly health research is a key element in the creation of evidence-base. But we cannot presume that all research will provide value for money. The use of some formal process for assessing the value of the research it funds is rightly becoming an expectation of all forward-looking health research funding agencies. Such a process meets the need for retrospective accountability and can help demonstrate that future investment in research is likely to represent a good use of public (or charitable) funds. Moreover, assessment of relative payback can contribute to the prioritisation of future investment in R&D, and can help to identify ways of conducting and managing research so as to maximise payback. These latter objectives contribute towards making research funding and management an evidence-based process.

Over a period of about 15 years, the Health Economics Research Group at Brunel University has been involved in developing an approach to the assessment of the 'payback' from health research that provides a consistent and comparable structure for assessment but can be flexibly applied, and adapted to different settings and situations. The Buxton/Hanney categorisation of benefits from research, and the associated model for assessment was originally developed for application to research funded by the UK Department of Health, but has since been applied with refinements and adaptations to a variety of research programmes in the UK and internationally by the HERG team and independently by researchers elsewhere.

This presentation will explain some of the background to the Buxton/Hanney approach, and set out its key characteristics. It will then illustrate how it has been applied in a number of different settings using different combinations of data-collection methods, to reflect the resources available for the particular exercise and the issues of particular interest to the specific research funding agencies.

The aim is to emphasise the importance of this area of 'research on research', and to demonstrate the usefulness of this flexible approach. It will also provide a general background to the exciting application of this approach to publicly funded health research in Hong Kong that will be presented later at this symposium.

