Developing the evidence base for accreditation of healthcare organisations: a call for transparency and innovation

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Why has so little evidence of the efficacy of accreditation programmes been published in the peer-reviewed literature? Since its introduction in the 1970s accreditation has spread across the world to become an established part of healthcare systems in over 70 countries and there is an associated international body. It is a textbook case of Everett Rogers’ Diffusion of innovation, whereby an idea whose time has come is adopted first by early proponents, then is received by the majority, and then becomes normal practice. However, the empirical evidence base for accreditation programmes is substantially undeveloped. It is not as if the challenge to publish evidence has been missing. There have been many calls in the international literature for research into accreditation. So while it is accepted that accreditation programmes have been an important driver to improve quality and safety in healthcare organisations, a rigorous, transparent examination of different aspects of accreditation, and publication of the subsequent results, has not become the norm.

Nevertheless, accreditation agencies continue to revise their programmes or standards and introduce new methods. These initiatives are potentially important, and we should not demand anything less. Accreditation agencies in the UK, Europe, Australia and Canada are engaged in research programmes. What is not quite so clear is how transparent agencies will be with their results. The challenge for accreditation agencies is to publish their research protocols and then their findings, both positive and negative, in the peer-reviewed literature. When they do publish their results the agencies will be explicitly displaying leadership, transparency and evidence of improvement, the very qualities and conduct they require of the health organisations they accredit. In an evidence-based world, should we demand anything less?

Competing interests: None.

REFERENCE


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Qual Saf Health Care 2009 18: 162-163
doi: 10.1136/qshc.2009.032359

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