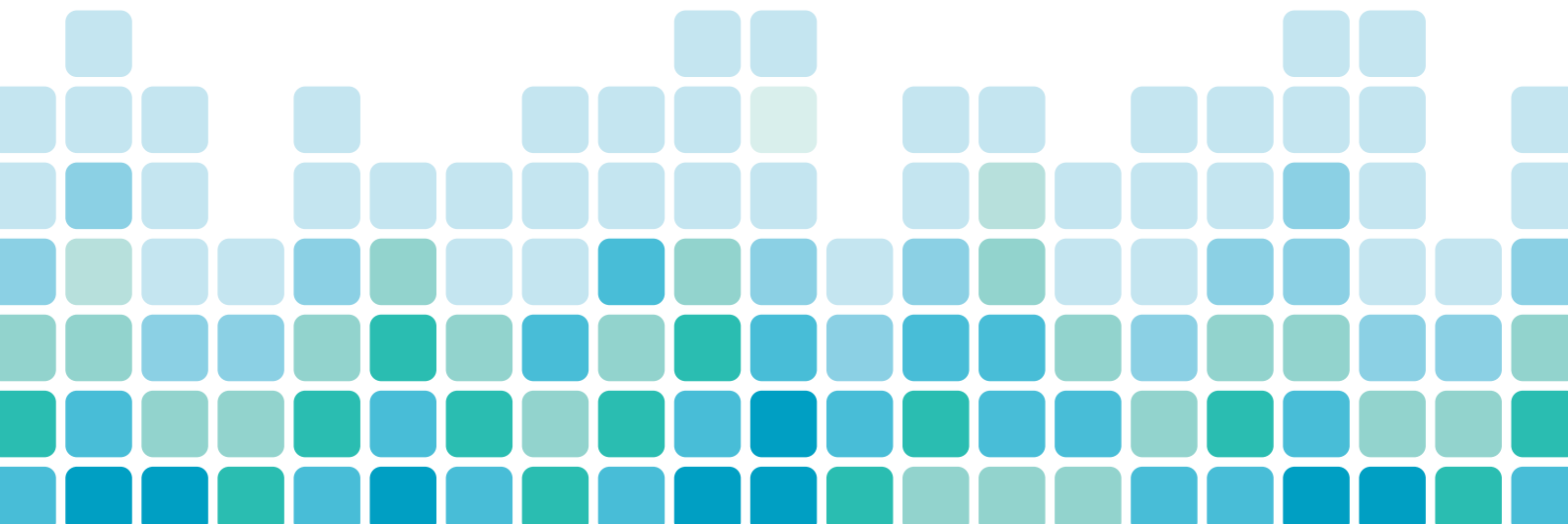


Public reporting improves healthcare

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Overview

Making information on health system performance available to the public can improve patient clinical outcomes and benefit the system as a whole, an independent review has found.

The review, *Public Reporting of Health System Performance: Review of Evidence on Impact on Patients, Providers and Healthcare Organisations*, was commissioned by the Bureau of Health Information and builds on previous research from around the world.

Its author, Dr Jack Chen from the Simpson Centre for Health Services Research at the University of New South Wales, found that public reporting affects health system performance in two main ways:

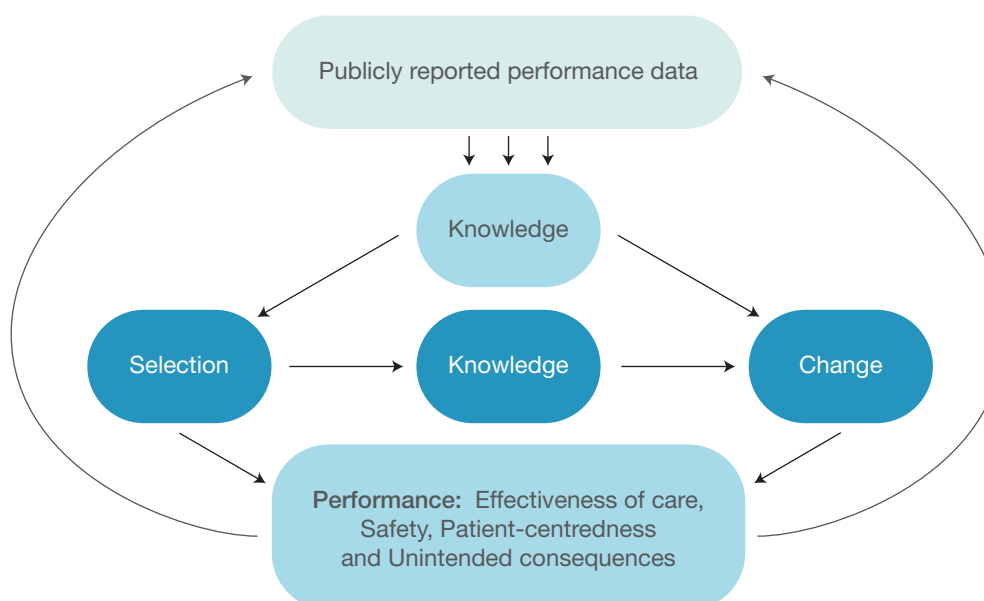
- **Selection** - where consumers' increased knowledge of healthcare providers' performance can help them make

informed choices. This can lead to low-performing providers losing market share, and being forced to make meaningful changes and improve performance.

- **Change** - healthcare workers' increased knowledge of their own performance can foster and inform their quality improvement activities perhaps by appealing to their professional ethos and motivation to provide better care.

Both of these pathways lead to the improvement of patient care, Dr Chen found. His review analysed high-quality research evidence in 75 international articles, which examined whether public reporting influences healthcare providers, particularly the performance of hospitals, in improving patient care. It provides substantial new evidence in support of public reporting.

Two pathways for improving performance through release of publicly reporting performance data



Berwick DM, James B, Coye MJ. Connections between quality measurement and improvement. *Medical Care* 2003 Jan;41(1 Suppl):130-8.

Impact of public reporting on hospitals

“There is strong and consistent evidence in supporting the notion that public disclosure of performance data stimulates quality improvement activities at hospital level,”

Dr Chen says in the review.

He found that this quality improvement activity can lead to better hospital care, and that the evidence indicates that clinical outcomes can improve as a result of public reporting of hospital performance.

“Recent evidence shows that public disclosure may be able to make significant and policy-important changes of consumers’ decisions in choosing hospitals in some settings,” he says.

For example, patients choose to avoid hospitals with poor ratings of infection control¹ and are more likely to choose hospitals with higher performance ratings.^{2,3}

Apart from increasing quality improvement activity in hospitals,^{4,5} and nursing homes,⁶ public reporting has been shown to improve:

- cardiac care^{7,8,9,10,11}
- hip and knee surgery^{12,13}
- obstetric care^{14,15,16}
- stroke care.¹⁷

These improvements in care result in:

- reduction in readmission rates¹⁸
- reduction in in-hospital death among patients with heart attack, congestive heart failure, stroke, pneumonia or infection¹⁹
- increased survival following heart attack²⁰ and cardiac surgery.^{21,22}

Summary of the strength and direction of evidence of impact of public reporting on the performance of healthcare organisations

| Selection | Quality Improvement | Clinical outcomes | Unintended consequences |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Considerable positive effect | Strongest positive effect | Strong positive effect | Uncertain effect or minor negative effect |

Getting the most out of public reporting

The Public Reporting of Health System

Performance review outlines strategies and procedures common to successful public reporting systems. Clearly, it is important to know not only that public reporting can have a positive impact but also what characteristics define successful public reporting that will impact on health systems and result in improvements for health consumers.

Some of the key success factors identified by the review are:

- Establish a centralised but independent agency to co-ordinate public reporting
- Establish evidence-based, culturally relevant guidelines on public reporting and consult and engage widely
- Be transparent on principles and methodology
- Set up clear objectives and target an audience
- Develop the right content according to the objectives, pre-test the product and distribute appropriately
- Understand the political and economic environment; change the culture of provider organisations and engage the public and media
- Monitor and minimise the unintended consequences of public reporting
- Provide timely evaluation of the public reporting activity itself and apply the learnt lessons to the new endeavours

- Set up a research agenda on specific issues that are important for the success of public reporting such as the development of standardised measures and building necessary data and information infrastructure for public reporting.

There is evidence that public reporting can have unintended consequences, which can be negative (risk-avoidance by doctors) and positive (improvement of care in unreported areas such as nursing homes), Dr Chen's review says.

"[But] Overall, public reporting holds great promises in achieving its potential provided that the risks are properly managed," he concludes.

About Dr Chen, the Bureau and this report

Public Reporting of Health System Performance was commissioned by the Bureau of Health Information with the assistance of the Sax Institute. This report is based on the independent review, *Public Reporting of Health System Performance: Review of Evidence on Impact on Patients, Providers and Healthcare Organisations*, published in August 2010 and available on the Sax Institute website www.saxinstitute.org.au

The Bureau is an independent, board-governed organisation, established by the NSW Government to excel in the delivery of timely, accurate and comparable information on the performance of the NSW public health system. It does this to better the health and wellbeing of the people in NSW.

Dr Jack Chen is a Senior Research Fellow at the Simpson Centre for Health Services Research, University of New South Wales. He has worked as a biostatistician, psychometrician and health econometrician in different projects. His recent research interests involve health services research, safety and quality of care and social epidemiology.

The Sax Institute has at its foundation a coalition of university and research groups undertaking population health and health services research in NSW. It is a unique organisation in Australia and builds on partnerships between researchers and health policy and service delivery agencies for better health.

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