

Challenges to Collecting Health Data for Secondary Use: A Case Study

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Abstract

There is a growing recognition of the need to base healthcare policies on accurate, detailed and timely data. These data are predominantly generated through clinical documentation in the process of direct patient care. This results in an increasing demand on healthcare organisations involved in direct patient care to collect and report these data for secondary use.

The literature review revealed that good quality data is essential to manage public health programmes and that there are many widely recognised challenges to the secondary use of data. This research utilised an embedded single-case study, to focus on describing the context for collection of health data for secondary use in Ireland, on the actual and perceived barriers to the collection of these data, and on opportunities which would facilitate that collection. The research method and data collection tools utilised included interviews, questionnaires and time studies, in addition to the literature review.

It was concluded that Ireland, similar to other countries, is experiencing several challenges in the collection of health data for secondary use. The sociocultural challenges to implementing health data collections for secondary use are as daunting as the technical and economic ones. An alternative strategy for data collection will be required to ensure a sustainable process going forward. Collection of health data must be integrated into the documentation of the clinical care pathway of the patient if it is to remain sustainable and accommodate the increasing requirements of a well-managed health service. This will require the implementation of the essential building blocks of a national health infrastructure network in addition to health data legislation, a data stewardship model, and best practice in national health data collection and data sharing. A comprehensive and well-managed change management process, in addition to accountable leadership both at local and national level, is necessary to ensure that systems implemented meet their full potential.