THE DILUTION OF A MANAGERIAL TECHNIQUE? THE CASE OF CLINICAL NETWORKS IN UK HEALTH CARE

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ABSTRACT

The managed network model of organization is becoming increasingly common in the UK National Health Service (NHS) as a means of streamlining and standardizing patient care across organizational and professional boundaries. However, there has been limited research regarding whether this is the most appropriate management style for delivery of health services. This seminar will draw upon research on managed clinical networks for cancer in the UK – a model which set out to guide and develop knowledge flows across cancer service providers.

The emergence of more network-based modes of organization is apparent across many public services but some early evidence suggests they have so far demonstrated limited impact (see Rashman and Hartley's 2002 study of UK local government). Network based thinking has been increasingly evident in the major health care sector, specifically in terms of redesigning complex patient journeys across different service providers. Cancer services represent an important and early example. Managed clinical networks for cancer have been established by the UK NHS as a means of streamlining patient care and fostering the flow of knowledge and good practice between the many different professions and organizations involved in care. This seminar will examine how the initial purpose of these networks has been diluted by the broader function of New Labour's 'modernisation agenda', which has ultimately focused on organizational restructure and

adhering to government targets. The seminar will discuss evidence from five case studies of managed clinical networks for cancer in London. It will link the empirical findings to an existing theoretical typology (Lozeau *et al.*, 2002) which analyses the impact of novel managerial techniques introduced into the public sector. This theoretical typology will be developed by proposing that instead of fitting within distinct categorizations, networks' responses to the introduction of new techniques flow between the different groupings in the typology as new issues emerge. Following a period of top-down corruption of the technique, the networks tended to adopt the model in a superficial manner, with no significant impact upon organizational processes.

References

Lozeau, D., A. Langley, et al. (2002). "The corruption of managerial techniques by organizations." <u>Human Relations</u> **55**(5): 537-64.

Rashman, L. and J. Hartley (2002). "Leading and learning? Knowledge transfer in the Beacon Council scheme." <u>Public Administration</u> **80**(3): 523-42.