

The Role of Evaluation in Strengthening Public Health Initiatives: Evaluating Colorectal Cancer Data

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A Public Health Practicum Experience

Introduction

Colorectal Cancer (CRC) is one of the leading causes of cancer-related deaths in the U.S.¹ While screening is an effective way to find precancerous polyps, people are not receiving screenings at the recommended rate.¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed a program to work in conjunction with clinics, hospitals, and other healthcare entities to help implement and strengthen evidence-based strategies to increase screening.¹ The Colorectal Cancer Control Program (CRCCP) collects and utilizes clinic/hospital data to assess if the evidence-based strategy increases screening.¹ The CRCCP focuses on four main activities within these facilities:

- Provider Assessment and Feedback
- Provider Reminders
- Patient Reminders
- Removing Structural Barriers for Patients

Role of Evaluation in Public Health Initiatives

Evaluation is a proven and an effective way to improve public health initiatives and measure the success of these initiatives.² Evaluation procedures help ensure that public health actions are pertinent to the intended audience, feasible, ethical, and accurate.² The overall purpose of evaluation is to assess the efficacy of a specific program or model and gain insight into what contributes to its success or failure.²

There are various types of evaluation designs. The specific type of evaluation used should align with the development of the program.



Practicum Experience

I was able to complete the practicum requirement for my Master of Public Health degree by working with a team of various partners to help evaluate colon cancer grant efforts. The grant focused on 6 clinics/hospitals/health systems in Kentucky in which CRC screenings were below 60%. These partners worked together in order to assess and improve CRC screening rates and follow-up compliance, and offer technical assistance as needed. Evaluation is a vital part of the successful implementation of the CRC grant and it was my main focus for the practicum experience.

Partnership and Collaboration



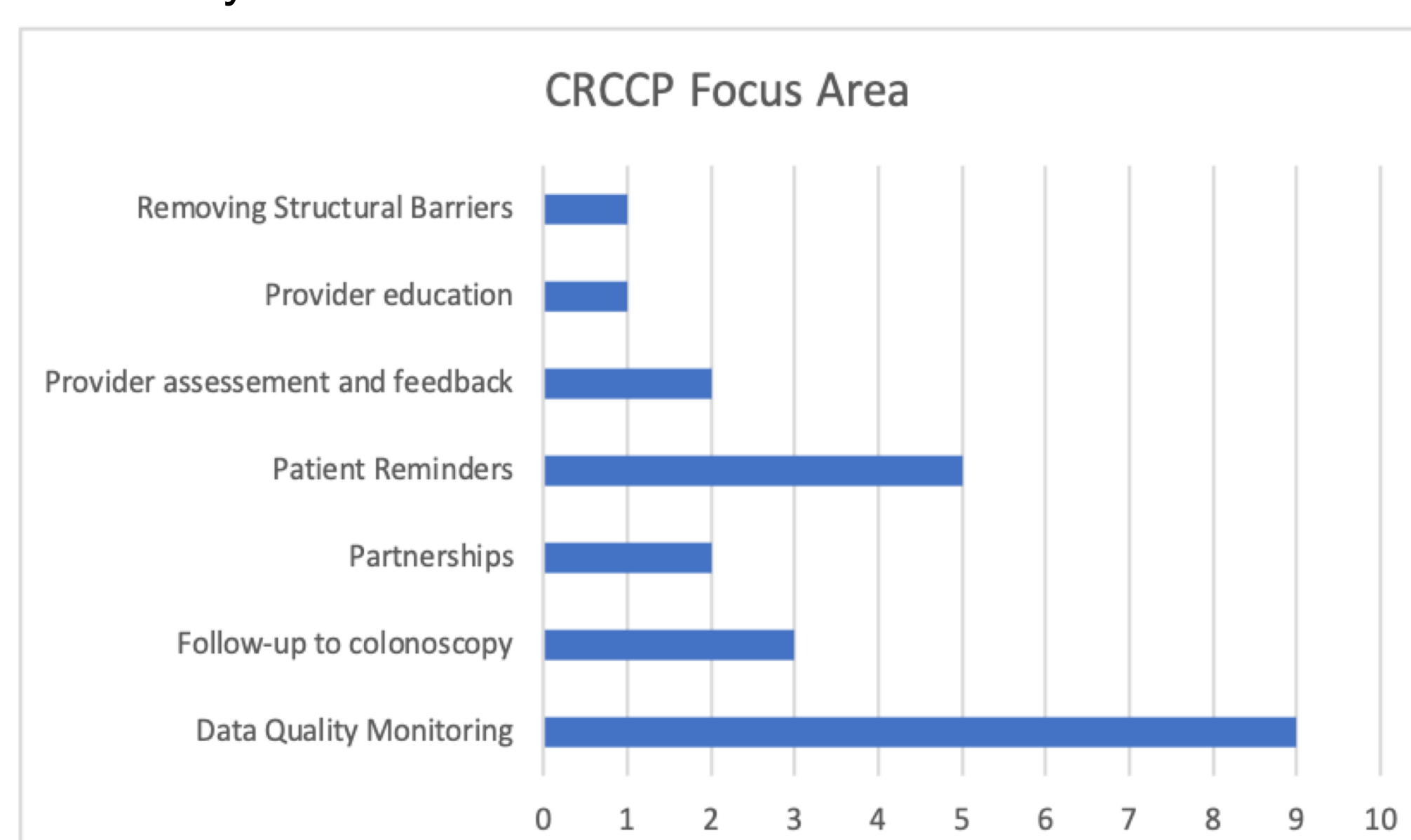
Evaluation Focus Areas

Following guidance from the CDC, our evaluation efforts focused on the four main activities outlined in the CRCCP among these clinics/hospitals/systems. In order to assess these four areas, key informant interviews were conducted as well as regular monthly meetings with Leadership Team partners working directly within each clinic/hospital/health system.

Data, Findings, and Insight

The purpose of the CRCCP clinic data collection is to assess the program reach as well as clinic characteristics, implementation of evidence-based interventions, health information technology and quality improvement activities, fecal test return rates, colonoscopy completion rates, and colorectal cancer (CRC) screening rates over time among CRCCP partner clinics.

Among our different evaluative efforts, we identified key themes derived through the reports provided by our Leadership team partners. Upon analyzing this information, we observed distinct patterns and trends among what was needed within the clinics/hospitals. This evaluative sample (seen below) uses data collected from July 2023 to October 2023.



Other types of data will continue to be collected, assessed, and monitored over the complete 5-year span of this grant cycle. By collecting and reporting these types of clinic/hospital data to the Leadership Team, the program's evaluation team can help ensure that the goals of the program are met.

Utilizing data and the subsequent findings will help reduce barriers and facilitate a greater uptake in CRC screenings.

Skills, Learning Outcomes and Impact

This practicum experience helped to:

- Facilitate my understanding of real-world data analysis.
- Enable me to gain insight into the impact that public health initiatives have on community health outcomes.
- Recognize how evaluation results can address challenges within each health care facility and can offer appropriate assistance to overcome these challenges.
- Expose me to virtual learning collaboratives which are a vital tool used within behavioral health initiatives to bring together key partners from various organizations.⁴
- Understand that learning collaboratives are a useful way to collect and assess feedback that can be used to improve the implementation of evidence-based practices such as CRC screening.
- Cultivate vital skills in clinic-level data interpretation and program evaluation.
- Apply practical application to theoretical concepts learned in the classroom.

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

Overall, this practicum experience allowed me to see the profound role that evaluation plays in influencing the effectiveness, success, and sustainability of public health programs. I am thankful to the Leadership Team that was comprised of the various partners. Special thanks to Dr. Jennifer Redmond Knight and Tiffany Opii for their assistance in guiding me through the evaluation process and Janie Cambron for her support throughout Practicum.



COLON CANCER
AWARENESS

Preventable. Treatable. Beatable.⁵

References

