Rapid Evaluation in Healthcare: opportunities, need and challenges

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What do we mean by ‘rapid’ evaluation?

Can be defined in several ways, for example:

- **Timescale**: e.g. 12 months or less, although this could be misleading as the primary definition

- **Design**:
  - *Rapid start*: getting evaluation project under way quickly
  - *Rapid completion*: short timescale from design → dissemination
  - *Rapid cycle*: longer evaluation, with early and/or ongoing reporting and feedback of findings

- **Purpose**: e.g. real-time or ‘alongside’ evaluation, to support innovation development and implementation
Why do rapid evaluation?

- To support learning and improvement as innovations are tested out in real-world settings where practitioners and policy makers are hungry for evidence

- Because innovations and contexts change during implementation – ongoing feedback of findings ensures relevance and usefulness

- To generate evidence to sustain innovations beyond initial pilots (and where timescales for decisions are often tight)

- To provide timely information about potential (or not) for scale up/roll out across the wider system

- Practical considerations – e.g. funders may not be able to commit resources for longer-term assessments
Why not?

- Pressure to work quickly (especially at the early stages) can affect:
  - Local buy-in and relationship building, including public and patient involvement
  - The quality of evaluation design

- Short projects cannot capture the full range of impacts; many key outcomes (e.g. health improvements, financial savings) are long-term

- There can be dangers with early assessment – judgements made before innovations have had a chance to succeed

- The key issue is evaluability; what innovations, contexts, outcomes are suitable for rapid evaluation?
Can you be both rapid and rigorous?

- Funders don’t want to trade rigour against rapidity, but will accept the need therefore to be selective about scope/focus.

- Design and preparatory work take time, whether the evaluation is rapid or longer in timescale.

- You have to understand what is (really) required – sites often want learning to help them improve; a rapid evaluation can work well where this is the case.

- Managing expectations is equally important: be clear (and consistent) about what is realistic in the timescale available.

- It can be very helpful to co-design a longer term approach to monitoring, to leave as a rapid evaluation ends.

- Additional specific skills are needed by evaluators.
Our approach in BRACE

- **Responsive**: timely and rapid working
- **Relevant**: working with stakeholder groups across all stages of the evaluation lifecycle
- **Rigorous**: theoretical and methodological rigour
- **Theory-based approach** to evaluation: if something works, how; if it doesn’t, why not?
Thank you

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This project was funded by the National Institute for Health Research Health Services and Delivery Research Programme (project number 16/138/31).

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