

# EVIDENCE AND THE TRIAL: THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF RESEARCH AND THE POLITICS OF IMPLEMENTATION IN HEALTH CARE

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- New technologies, expanding universe of **invention**. Complex **regulatory** structures that struggle keep up with **ambitions** and **discoveries**.
- Existing technologies, expanding universe of **evaluation**. Complex **policy** structures that struggle to keep up with **demands** and **costs**.

# The importance of 'evidence'

- 'Evidence-based' health care - a fundamental shift in thinking about professional behaviour.
  - Shifts from individual authority to distributed decisions, from cases to populations, from prognoses to risks.
  - Focus of debate – changing relations between citizens and states, corporate domination of autonomous professions

# Professional change? Yes, but....

- Debates have focused on doctors and patients as 'victims' or 'subjects' of 'evidence-based' policy
- But 'evidence-basedness' implies major structural changes for universities.
- Centres for the design, manufacture and circulation of new evidence, in new forms.

# Mundane but pressing problems

- **Policy:** A rational basis for decisions about coverage and spending (*shaping*).
- **Service:** A rational basis for decisions about delivery and quality (*production*).
- **Politics:** A rational intermediary between citizens and states (*mediation*)

# New 'proto-disciplines'

- The age of **evaluation**....
    - Clinical and cost effectiveness (Health Technology Assessment)
    - Evidence into practice (Quality Improvement)
    - Implementation and change (Service Organisation and Delivery)
- .....is the age of **methodologists**.

# Methods

- Investment in ‘methodological improvement’ in the design of clinical trials and their application to increasingly ‘complex’ interventions
- The rise of secondary research (systematic reviews, meta-analysis, technology appraisal)
- Massive increase in numbers of ‘evidence’ producing researchers.

# Decoupling?

- Critique of HTA/HSR focuses on *methods* and their effects (apolitical problem solving)
- More than a matter of facts....
- Focus on methods decouples the production of knowledge and the assimilation of information
- Significant changes in relations between sponsors, evaluators, evaluated.



# Decoupling?

- Decoupling of the business of producing evidence from assessments of its moral or political value (leads to economic reductionism).
- A problem in political contexts where effective management of the public sector has become a central political platform.

# Effects

- Professionals as generic public sector workers – operating within patterns of governance in which the circulation of evidence is a central mechanism of political control.
- A cadre of researchers who are ‘outsourced civil servants of an evidence informed state’.

A stylized blue dragon logo is positioned on the left side of the slide. The dragon is depicted in a profile view, facing right, with its head raised and mouth open. The dragon's body is composed of several overlapping, curved shapes that create a sense of movement and texture. The entire logo is rendered in a solid blue color, matching the background.

Thank you!

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