

EDITORIAL

From Research Evidence Generation to Healthcare Impact: Strengthening Knowledge Translation in Allied Health Sciences in Sri Lanka

The publication of the second issue of the *OUSL Journal of Health Sciences* marks another important milestone in strengthening research engagement within faculty and the broader allied health community in Sri Lanka. While the inaugural issue highlighted the importance of building a strong research culture, this issue turns attention toward an equally important question; How can research evidence findings create real improvements in healthcare practice and patient outcomes? Research evidence is valuable not only when it is generated, but also when that evidence contributes to better healthcare services, education, policy making, and clinical practice.

Globally, health research output has grown substantially over recent decades. However, producing research evidence alone does not automatically improve healthcare systems. Many valuable findings remain underutilized which create gaps between what is known through research and what is routinely practiced in healthcare settings (Allied et al., 2025). When research evidence remains limited to publications, reports, or conference presentations without influencing healthcare decisions or practice, opportunities for improving patient care may be lost. Therefore, more attention should be given to ensuring that research evidence led to real improvements in healthcare practice and patient care.

This process of moving research evidence into practice is commonly referred to as knowledge translation or implementation science. Rather than viewing research evidence as an endpoint, knowledge translation focuses on ensuring that research evidence is shared, adapted and applied within healthcare settings to support practice, decision making, and improve the healthcare system (Khatri et al., 2025). Ultimately, the aim is to ensure that research evidence is used in ways that benefit healthcare services and patient outcomes (World Health Organization, 2022).

The importance of knowledge translation has become increasingly urgent within modern healthcare systems due to changing disease patterns, demographic translations, and growing expectations for quality healthcare. Sri Lanka is currently experiencing a substantial burden of non-communicable diseases, which account for approximately 83% of all deaths in the country, increasing pressure on healthcare services and long-term care systems (World Health Organization, 2023). Diabetes remains as a major public health concern, with approximately 10.2% among adults aged 20-79 years (International Diabetes Federation [IDF], 2024). Moreover, Sri Lanka is facing rapid increasing of aging population. As indicated in recent



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Corresponding Author's Email:
edousljhs@ou.ac.lk



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4514-7295>

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national statistics, approximately 18% of the population is aged 60 years or above, escalating demands for chronic disease management, rehabilitation services, disability care, and long-term support systems (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2024).

These changing healthcare demands cause increasing pressure on healthcare systems to deliver high-quality cost-effective patient-centered care. Thus, healthcare organizations are expected to improve quality patient care outcomes and maintain evidence-based standards of practice (Flynn et al., 2023). Simultaneously, patients are becoming more informed and increasingly expect healthcare services that are responsive to their preferences and needs. Within this context, knowledge translation needs to ensure that available research evidence is effectively integrated into routine practice, service delivery, and healthcare decision-making (Dunn et al., 2023).

Knowledge translation has particular importance within the field of allied health sciences because these professionals work closely with patients, families and communities. Nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, psychologists, counsellors, radiographers, medical laboratory scientists, and many other allied health professionals continuously make decisions that influence patient outcomes. Integrating research evidence into everyday clinical practice by these professionals supports safer patient care, strengthens service quality, improves efficiency, and promotes more informed clinical decisions-making. Furthermore, healthcare organizations with stronger research engagement often demonstrate better service outcomes with improved organizational performance while allowing allied health professionals greater professional development opportunities (Harding et al., 2017). However, translating research evidence into practice within Sri Lanka and similar low-and middle-income countries remains challenging. Plausible reasons contributing to persistent gaps between research evidence and routine practice include workforce constraints, heavy clinical workloads, limited institutional support, weak research evidence practice partnerships, and inadequate implementation capacity (Mohomed, 2024; Sebire et al. 2025)

Recent research findings further emphasized that evidence generation alone is insufficient for healthcare improvement. Sustainable healthcare change requires organized approaches that support the adoption, adaptation, and continuation of evidence-based interventions within real-world settings (Flynn et al., 2023). Accordingly, knowledge translation should not be viewed as a final step after completing research but rather as an ongoing process integrated throughout the research cycle. Despite its recognized importance, translating evidence into practice remains challenging. Healthcare professionals frequently face barriers including restricted time, competing clinical responsibilities, limited access to research resources, lack of institutional support, and inadequate opportunities for research training (Field et al., 2014). In some healthcare settings, researchers and healthcare practitioners continue to function within fragmented healthcare systems, limiting opportunities for collaboration. Negative attitude toward evidence-based practice and weak research partnerships may further reduce the possibility that research evidence will be integrated into routine clinical practice (Dunn et al., 2023).

Addressing these challenges to translate research evidence needs collective effort across educational institutions, healthcare organization, professional bodies, and policymakers. Capacity-building initiatives such as research mentorship, training programmes, journal clubs, interdisciplinary collaborations, and dissemination activities can strengthen healthcare professionals' confidence in applying research evidence within practice settings (Flynn et al., 2023; Harding et al., 2017). More importantly, stronger partnerships between researchers, clinicians, policymakers, and communities can help ensure that research remains relevant, practical, and responsive to healthcare needs (Dunn et al., 2023).

Strengthening knowledge translations is particularly important in countries like Sri Lanka, where locally generated research evidence can provide solutions that are contextually relevant and responsive to population needs. Research that addresses local healthcare priorities and service delivery challenges is more likely to produce sustainable improvements when effectively integrated into healthcare practice and policy. In this process, allied health professionals should not be viewed merely as consumers of evidence but also as active contributors to knowledge generation, translation, and implementation. Through interdisciplinary collaboration with medicine, nursing, public health, and other healthcare

disciplines, allied health professionals can contribute to healthcare innovation, support rehabilitation and service improvements, and advocate for evidence-informed policies that respond to emerging healthcare needs (Dunn et al., 2023).

As healthcare systems continue to face increasingly complex challenges, strengthening knowledge translation—should become a shared responsibility among researchers, educators, clinicians, administrators and policymakers. Generating research evidence represents only the beginning of the research journey. The ultimate objective should be to ensure that research findings contribute meaningfully to healthcare improvement, strengthens professional practice, inform policy decisions, and enhance healthcare improvement. Through collaboration, sustained institutional support, and continued commitment to evidence-informed practice, allied health professionals can move beyond evidence generation toward creating meaningful healthcare impact.

Looking ahead, greater attention should be directed towards strengthening implementation science within allied health disciplines, generating context-specific evidence for low-and middle-income countries, and integrating emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital health information systems to support knowledge translation activities. Equally important is the need to evaluate knowledge translation efforts not only by research output but also by their impact on practice change, service delivery, and patient outcomes.

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Dr. K.A. Sriyani
PhD (USJ), BSc (Hons) Nursing (OUSL)
Editor-in-Chief
OUSL Journal of Health Sciences