

**Outcomes from the Mount Sinai Social Work Leadership Enhancement  
Program: Evaluation and Extrapolation**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis  
Group in *Social Work in Health Care* on 25 Sep 2008, available online:

[http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1300/J010v43n02\\_11](http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1300/J010v43n02_11)

## **Outcomes from the Mount Sinai Social Work Leadership Enhancement**

### **Program: Evaluation and Extrapolation**

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Summary: This article presents an overview of outcomes from the Mount Sinai Leadership Enhancement Program as identified by previous program participants from Melbourne, Australia. These are categorised into: (1) Personal/professional, (2) Intra-organisational, (3) Inter-organisational, and (4) International outcomes. Two illustrative examples are provided of international outcomes demonstrating how the ongoing commitment of Professor Epstein has extended and embedded the principles of practice-based research in Melbourne, and how the over-riding principles of the program have been applied by participants in establishing collaborative relationships with colleagues in our neighbouring South-East Asian region.

Key-words: Leadership Enhancement, Outcomes Evaluation, International Implications

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The Mount Sinai Social Work Leadership Enhancement Program was originally established in 1989 to offer leadership development opportunities for Israeli Hospital Social Work Directors. Australian social work health-care managers were also included from 1990 after a Melbourne social work academic, Catherine James, successfully advocated for our inclusion. This three month program has generally been offered on an annual basis and includes up to four participants (although the number of participants has varied on occasion).

Up to this time there have been a total of twenty-seven Australian participants. Whilst Australia-wide participation has been encouraged, the majority of participants have come from the state of Victoria where the organising committee (the Australian Association of Social Workers International Continuing Education Committee – AASW ICEC) is based (sixteen from Victoria; four from New South Wales; two each from South Australia & Queensland; one each from Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory & Northern Territory).

For comprehensive background details of the program, readers are referred to Dr's Rehr, Rosenberg, and Blumenfield's informative (1993) article, "Enhancing Leadership Skills through International Exchange: The Mount Sinai Experience".

In summary, this 10-12 week program consists of approximately four weeks of orientation providing an overview of relevant departments, services, and programs within the context of the medical center and the city of New York. The structured adult learning model then provides open access to an extensive range of documentation, personnel and meetings. Participants also pursue an individual

learning program (eg developing specialist areas of knowledge, research projects, program initiatives etc). While immersing themselves in the life and culture of Mt Sinai Medical Center and of New York City, participants are exposed to a range of leadership models and provided with instruction on practice-based research principles and academic/practice partnership development.

The key aims of the program are to enhance participants: Leadership capabilities; Knowledge & skills to implement quality programs; Ability to assess & improve programs; Ability to conduct applied studies; Improvement of social health policy; Develop cost effectiveness of service programs (Rehr et al 1993, p.22).

One of the primary outcomes of this program has been to promote a more lateral approach within leadership and management thinking in regard to social work program development and management in health-care. This spans all levels of management practice including micro (being the individual), meso (including organisational practices) and macro (which ultimately incorporates an international perspective and issues relating to globalisation).

There are a number of important reasons for evaluating the outcomes of the program for past participants. Firstly, for reflective practice purposes it is of interest to the participants themselves to review the benefits accrued from the program and the effects upon their subsequent professional development. It is also important to members of the Australian ICEC committee that they continue to review the outcomes of the program so that they can correctly advise future participants of the particular benefits to be gained, and more importantly to provide recommendations to the Mt

Sinai organisers as to which aspects of the program were of the greatest value in meeting the intended goals and resulted in beneficial outcomes.

Indeed, Rehr et al (1993) note that, “Follow-up evaluation of change at individual, departmental, institutional, and community levels would be sought at later periods when visitors had returned home and would assist ongoing program development” (p.26). This article summarising information from presentations at the 2004 Doris Siegel Colloquium aims to partially fulfil that goal.

The genesis of the presentation at the Doris Siegel Colloquium was also inspired from Dr Blumenfield’s informative key-note address on *Collaboration in the New Era* at a symposium held in Melbourne in October, 2000. Her address resonated with the experiences of those present who had participated in the Leadership Enhancement Program and inspired them to re-evaluate their progress.

The structured evaluations which inform this article took place in two parts. For reasons of convenience relating to access to participants, they were limited to previous participants solely from Victoria in Australia.

The initial evaluation was undertaken by the second author in 1994. This included a review of all available documentation and in-depth semi-structured interviews with five previous program participants. This was a wide-ranging evaluation which covered the participants’ expectations prior to, experiences during, and post participation.

The second evaluation was jointly undertaken by both the authors in March 2000 and included a small survey and a focus group discussion relating to participants perceived outcomes of the program. This included a total of eleven program participants.

### Individual Professional & Personal Development Outcomes

Respondents identified numerous individual professional and personal development outcomes that resulted from the program. Firstly, all returnees noted that a significant feature of the program had been their recommitment to their social work identity and the profession in general after witnessing the strong, inspirational role-models within the senior management team of the Mount Sinai Social Work Services department. Participants also frequently reported returning feeling ‘rejuvenated’ and having increased levels of motivation to tackle difficult issues within their various work environments.

Many respondents noted that their individual leadership skills had further developed from implementing the *Take Charge Survival Strategies* as were presented by Dr Blumenfield at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Health and Mental Health. These strategies included the foci of *maintaining perspective, developing population-based services, adding value* and *taking ownership*.

Another result of having participated in the program has been that approximately half of the Victorian participants have gone on to enrol in further post-graduate study.

Several participants also noted the tangible flow-on effects in terms of career enhancement after having gone on to secure more senior positions since returning from the program. Indeed, one participant secured a key health management role in Melbourne while still actually on the program. Her interviewers appeared quite impressed at her selection for, and participation within, this esteemed program.

### Intra-organisational Outcomes

At an intra-organisational level, the implementation of Dr Blumenfield's *Take Charge Survival Strategies* has led to a greater level of proactivity within service development initiatives, the development of strategic partnerships (particularly through inter-disciplinary collaboration), and has reportedly resulted in raising the profile of social work services within participants agencies and being seen to add value to organisational activities.

There has also been a notable sharing of leadership knowledge from the program participants within their own organisations (and also between organisations). Some of this has occurred through role-modelling, mentoring and supervision processes. The ripple effects of learning have also occurred through the collaborative efforts such as those described in the *Survival Strategies* implementation. This has been described by Cath James as *distributive leadership*.

Another important outcome from the program has been the development of practice-based research efforts. An integral component of the Leadership Enhancement Program is the model of practice-based research taught by program consultant, Irwin Epstein (Helen Rehr Professor of Applied Social Work Research, Hunter College).

The benefits of such an approach have been realised through implementation by several program returnees within their organisations. For example practice-based research programs have been instituted at the Cancer Council of Victoria, The Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre, and the Royal Children's Hospital of Victoria.

#### Inter-organisational Outcomes

The practice-based research efforts have also developed into more formal academic/practice partnerships for several organisations. Most of these have developed with the University of Melbourne and significantly, all have involved past Mt Sinai Leadership Enhancement Program scholars. These partnerships are continuing to grow in strength and can be seen to be a tangible outcome of the program.

Additionally at an inter-organisational and professional level, past program participants have maintained an active and influential role within several of the AASW Special Interest Groups. These include the *Health Social Work Directors Group*, the *Victorian Oncology Social Workers Group*, and a *Practice-Based Research Interest Group*. These are further examples of *distributive leadership* creating change through ripple effects.

As a sub-committee of the *Health Social Work Directors Group*, ICEC holds regular forums to promote the program and further international collaborative efforts. Past program participants have also taken up opportunities of presenting on the program and its beneficial outcomes at numerous conferences.



### International Outcomes

The Leadership Enhancement Program returnees have been active not only in presenting at a national level, but also internationally, and have also been instrumental in the development of international conference initiatives such as the International Conferences in Health and Mental Health. These notably evolved out of the Leadership Enhancement Program initiative at Mount Sinai.

Another important outcome of participation in the program was identified as the development of international 'connections'. The concept of an international 'community' of social work health-care managers has been described as being of particular value to previous program participants in terms of being a source of both additional collegial support and informational resources.

The development of these international collegial relationships has also resulted in a number of professional visits to Australia by key Mt Sinai staff. The first of these was by Helen Rehr (Professor Emeritus, Mt Sinai School of Medicine) in 1985. In 1998 Melbourne hosted the Second International Conference on Health and Mental Health which resulted in a number of Mt Sinai staff visiting Melbourne. Susan Blumenfield (Mt Sinai Social Work Director) returned in 2000 followed by Virginia Walther (Senior Assistant Social Work Director, Mt Sinai) in May 2002 and in March 2005, Nancy Cincotta (Mt Sinai Oncology Preceptor) also undertook visits to Melbourne and Sydney. Each of these senior staff provided guest lectures, and consultations with senior health care staff.

The model of international exchange of knowledge from the Mount Sinai program has also been directly influential in the establishment of the *Victorian Oncology Social Workers Group*. This group have begun an exchange program with like-minded colleagues in the United States in order to share relevant knowledge and experience within their specialist area of practice.

#### Extension of Practice Based Research

As previously described, there have been a number of enhanced research, educational and professional development opportunities that have flowed from the connections made through the program but one of the most tangible and useful examples has been the ongoing commitment of Professor Epstein in providing specialist consultancy on practice-based research development. Professor Epstein has continuously made himself available not only by email and phone but has undertaken an extensive series of visits to Australia (May/June 1994, July 1998, June/July 1999, March 2001, January 2003, June 2003, April 2004, June 2005).

Professor Epstein's first visit in May 1994 was as *Miegunyah Scholar* at *The University of Melbourne*. His *Miegunyah Address* was entitled *Integrating the challenge and challenging the integration of research and social work practice* and outlined his vision for the development of practice-based research and furthering academic-practice partnerships. The key themes outlined in that address over a decade ago have formed a solid framework for the developmental work that he has gone on to promote through his ongoing contact.

The key themes outlined in that address included the needs for: (1) Open exchange of ideas across institutional and national boundaries; (2) Quality, practice-based research education and continuing education; (3) Support structures that promote practice-based research within social work departments and across professional disciplines; (4) Support structures that promote practice-based research by linking the academy and social agencies; (5) Intra-mural and interdisciplinary accountability structures that engage professionals in pursuits that include but transcend self-interest and self-promotion; (6) Leadership (i.e. individuals who serve as models and inspirations).

Through Professor Epstein's contributions during that visit, Australian health social workers were exposed to new possibilities for research and professional development. There was a heightened understanding of social work as an international profession similar to that of medicine.

Correspondence back to Mt Sinai at that time notes "the ripple effect...and groundswell of cultural change via program returnees" and "Professor Epstein's role as a catalyst...providing inspiration and momentum...helping envisage social work within the international context"; "...an invaluable contribution. I feel he has put us about five years ahead in terms of winning the hearts and minds of the social workers here about the value of practice research. Equally, he has really lifted our profile and credibility within the research community here".

During his visits to Australia, Professor Epstein has provided numerous consultations, lectures, keynote presentations and workshops at hospitals, health services, universities, and for government officials. He has provided many specialist

consultations to six different health care networks within Victoria as well as to others in South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. His work at *The University of Melbourne* has included consultations with the *Course Advisory Committee*, lectures for undergraduate and post-graduate students, consultations on thesis development, facilitation of faculty workshops, consultation on the development of the MSW (Health) degree and on the formation of a collaborative *Social Work Academic-Practice Health Research Consortia*.

Over the succession of his visits, Professor Epstein's work has expanded to include a greater focus on inter-disciplinary approaches to research. This began during his 1998 visit in providing consultation to the multi-disciplinary team at the *Early Psychosis Prevention Centre* and continued through his facilitation of a series of workshops in 2001 for the *Allied Health & Nursing Research Group* at the *Royal Children's Hospital*. These workshops included participants from Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Play Therapy, Psychology, and the Child Protection Unit. The 2001 visit also included multi-disciplinary consultations across the *Youth Drug & Alcohol Services* at the *Western Health Network*.

The inter-disciplinary approach continued in the January 2003 visit with a practice-based research lecture for multi-disciplinary staff at *North-West Mental Health Service* followed by workshop consulting on staff research projects and through a series of research consultations at the *Alfred Hospital* and at the *Young Persons Health Service* to develop plans for research and evaluation of activities.

As a result of the overwhelming positive responses to these multi-disciplinary consultations, Professor Epstein was invited to provide the keynote address for *Practice-Based Research for Allied Health Professionals: A skills oriented symposium* in June 2003.

Professor Epstein's continuing commitment and leadership has personified the values and principles of the Mt Sinai Leadership Enhancement Program. His continued inspirational input has tangibly increased research development not just for social work, but also a range of other allied health disciplines.

#### Singapore Network Development

Another international outcome that owes its inception to the innovative Mt Sinai Leadership Enhancement Program has been the development of professional and educational links between health social workers in Melbourne and our south-east Asian neighbours, most notably in Singapore. This has resulted in several exchange visits and the establishment of some educational and professional development placements. The Singapore Melbourne Health Social Work Network was formally established in 2002.

The network was originally established to provide an easily accessible conduit for enquiries about visiting Melbourne and to promote collegiate contact and friendships between social workers in Singapore and Australia. It has resulted in seven Singaporean health social workers undertaking work-place based 'attachments' in Melbourne, enrolments of Singaporean student in post-graduate courses at *The*

*University of Melbourne*, and several collaborative academic-practice visits to Singapore.

The key aims and elements of the Network are described in the subsequent article by Jane Miller. The Network holds monthly meetings in Melbourne which are quite informal and provides opportunities for meeting with visiting social workers from Singapore. They are able to connect with Australians at a social level and to present on aspects of their work. Australians also report on their visits to Singapore.

Academic-practice partnerships are promoted through the strong support that the Network receives from *The University of Melbourne School of Social Work*. The Network maintains communication through use of its extensive email contact list consisting of approximately 100 members in both Australia and Singapore.

This Network has been built on the basic principles of the Leadership Enhancement Program and the ideals of internationalism that it embodies. The developmental processes employed have aimed to use the social work concepts of networking and community development to respond to varying requests and needs identified. The outcomes achieved thus far by the Network are viewed as an exciting beginning and it is anticipated that these connections will further strengthen and provide *distributive leadership* outcomes similar to those achieved from the Mt Sinai Leadership Enhancement Program.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings indicate that the numerous outcomes from the program are indeed multi-layered and inter-connected at the personal, professional, organisational,

and international levels. They can also be seen to be continuing to develop as the 'global-picture' of health management continues to change in unpredictable ways.

The previous participants all agree that the program has been successfully improving social work health-care management in Victoria primarily through enhancement of the individual participant's leadership skills, and secondarily through the practices of *distributive leadership*.

It is also clear that exchange on an international basis is incredibly valuable for professional development at a senior level. It can be seen that it can act as a catalyst for broader educational, research and professional development.

It is important to note the limitations on outcomes that were also identified through the evaluation process. It appears that there has limited success with the particular goal of enhancing development of new programs. This may in part be due to the prevailing political environment in the state of Victoria over the last decade during which there was a particularly conservative government with regressive policies. The entire health-care sector suffered rolling financial cuts during that time which is likely to have affected the potential for development of new programs. Nevertheless, that aspect of the program remains an achievable goal.

Overall however, it is concluded that the program serves as an excellent model for international contribution and collaboration within the profession.

Reference:

Rehr, H., Rosenberg, G., & Blumenfield, S. (1993) Enhancing Leadership Skills Through an International Exchange: The Mount Sinai Experience. *Social Work in Health Care*, 18(3/4),13-33.