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INnovative health Services & Practice
Informed by Research & Evaluation Network

2015 InspireNet Final Report

Demonstrating the Impact and Value of InspireNet

Prepared by the UBC eHealth Strategy Office
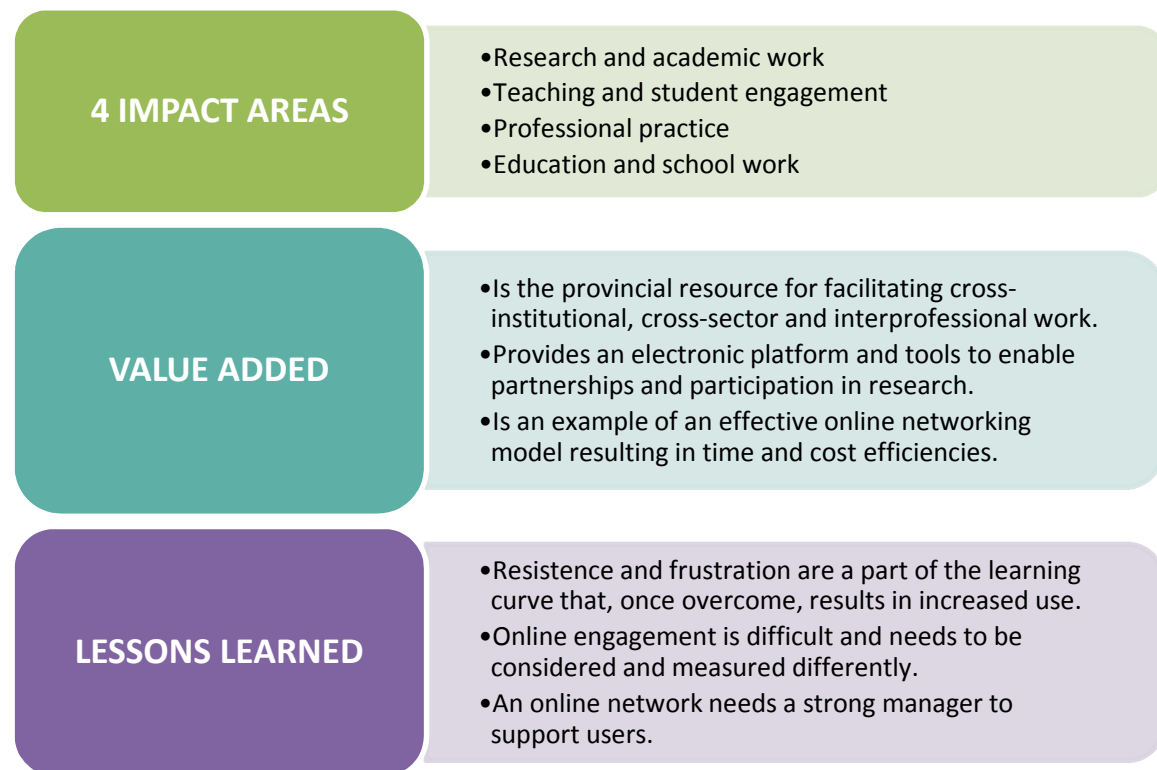
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

InspireNet (*Innovative Health Services & Practice Informed by Research & Evaluation Network*) is a network of researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, educators and students working together to improve health services in British Columbia (BC), Canada. Over the past five years the network has grown to include over 3,700 members. The network is supported by an electronic platform and offers members tools and resources to connect and share information with one another.

As part of a larger overall evaluation framework, in the summer of 2014 interviews were conducted with members and a focus group was held with the Evaluation Coordinating Team. The purpose of the final interviews and focus group was to collect data from key InspireNet participants about lessons learned, and the process and overall impact of using the electronic platform for research facilitation.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Key findings from the interviews with InspireNet members are highlighted below:

4 IMPACT AREAS	• Research and academic work • Teaching and student engagement • Professional practice • Education and school work
VALUE ADDED	• Is the provincial resource for facilitating cross-institutional, cross-sector and interprofessional work. • Provides an electronic platform and tools to enable partnerships and participation in research. • Is an example of an effective online networking model resulting in time and cost efficiencies.
LESSONS LEARNED	• Resistence and frustration are a part of the learning curve that, once overcome, results in increased use. • Online engagement is difficult and needs to be considered and measured differently. • An online network needs a strong manager to support users.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Key findings from the focus group with Evaluation Coordinating Team members are highlighted below:

IMPACT
- Working in an electronic environment→ skill development→ new way of working.
- Connections to other professionals and professional development opportunities.
- Insights into how to optimize online networking.

EXPERIENCES
- Rewarding to watch the growth of the network, see members engage and evaluate progression over time.
- Challenging to sell the idea to outsiders and continuously plan for sustainability.

COLLABORATIVE SUCCESS
- The collaborative spirit ran through InspireNet in many forms:
  - Membership
  - Leadership team
  - Network roles

TURNING POINTS
- Growth in membership and network activities overtime.
- The completion of project and team work done entirely online.
- Achievement of milestones and goals.

OVERALL THEMES

Data from the interviews and the focus groups revealed the following overall key findings and themes:

MAJOR STRENGTHS
- The open and inclusive nature of the membership enables connections and fosters collaborations between groups of diverse stakeholders.
- A strong leadership and management model instill a collaborative spirit that ran throughout all activities.

KEY IMPACTS
- InspireNet introduced members to new technologies and ways of working.
- InspireNet provided a platform that enabled time and cost efficiencies resulting in more meaningful participation in research and knowledge translation/ dissemination.

LESSONS LEARNED
- A strong network manager skilled and available to support members is an important consideration.
- A long-term evaluation plan that collects progressive data over time helps with iterative quality improvement and elucidating key findings and impact.

These findings from the interviews and the focus group provide evidence of how InspireNet has impacted members. Coupled with previous evaluation data, a lot has been revealed about the true value of InspireNet over time. In moving ahead, InspireNet can build on these lessons and successes and continue to contribute to the improvement of health services in BC.

BACKGROUND

InspireNet (*Innovative Health Services & Practice Informed by Research & Evaluation Network[1]*) is a network of researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, educators and students working together to improve health services in British Columbia (BC), Canada. Funded for six years (Nov 2009 – Nov 2015) through the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR) via its BC Nursing Research Initiative (BCNRI), the mission of InspireNet is to foster optimal creation, sharing, and use of health services knowledge and research expertise across the province of BC[2]. Through province-wide networking, directed supportive activities, and linkages between health services and academic institutions, the network aims to achieve five outcome goals (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The five outcome goals of InspireNet
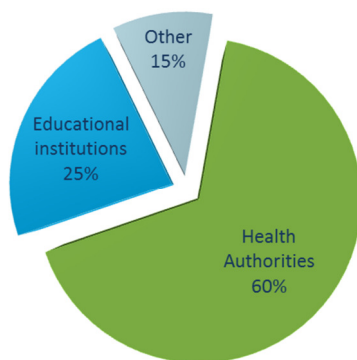
Figure 2: Membership breakdown by affiliation

After five years of operation, InspireNet has evolved to be a primarily virtual (i.e. online) network of over 3,700 members[3]. Figure 2 provides a breakdown of InspireNet's membership by affiliation.

The network is supported by an integrated electronic or virtual platform including a website with both public and password-protected components, e-newsletter, searchable member database, electronic communities of practice (eCoPs) and web-conferencing. These tools enable members to connect with others, join and participate in various eCoPs/ action teams, and access and share information and links with one another. It is through these activities that InspireNet supports health services research use and knowledge translation, and impacts health professional practice and education in BC.

Since its inception in November 2009, InspireNet has engaged in a series of evaluation activities. Figure 3 illustrates the data collection points.

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[1] Note: The name of the network changed in April 2014 to InspireNet: Innovative health Services & Practice Informed by Research & Evaluation Network

[2] Initially focused on nursing, in 2013 InspireNet expanded its mandate to be inclusive of all healthcare disciplines.

[3] As of February 2015

Figure 3: InspireNet data collection timeline and activities

Previous evaluation findings indicated that members valued their participation in the network and pointed to the need to further examine InspireNet's impact on research and professional practice. As part of the larger overall framework evaluating the processes and outcomes of the network, interviews were conducted with members and a focus group was held with the Evaluation Coordinating Team in the summer of 2014. The purpose of the final interviews and focus group was to collect data from key InspireNet members about lessons learned, and the process and overall impact of using the electronic platform for research facilitation over the past five years.

The remaining report is divided into two parts. Part 1 details the methods and findings from the **member interviews**. Part 2 details the methods and findings from the focus group with the **Evaluation Coordinating Team**. An overall Conclusion section follows.

PART 1: MEMBER INTERVIEWS

METHODS

A targeted recruitment list was created to identify three groups of potential interview participants:

1. **Survey volunteers**: InspireNet members who had indicated in past InspireNet surveys that they would be interested in participating in future data collection activities.
2. **Key informants**: InspireNet members identified as 'super-users' by the InspireNet Leadership Team because of their level of involvement in InspireNet activities.
3. **Closed/ action team leaders**: InspireNet members who lead teams using the electronic platform.

In total, there were 32 members on the recruitment list (19 survey volunteers; 9 key informants; and 4 team leaders). Personalized email invitations were sent out in June 2014. Three additional reminder emails were sent to members who had not responded. Recruitment efforts ended in August 2014.

In total, 22 interviews were completed between June and September 2014 (11 survey volunteers; 8 key informants; and 3 team leaders). The overall response rate was 69%.

Interviews protocols varied by participant type and all questions were semi-structured in nature. Interviews were 10 minutes to 30 minutes in length and were conducting via web conferencing at a time convenient for the participant. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

A coding framework was developed from the specific goals of and questions from the interviews. Transcripts were then coded in NVivo. Select codes were then summarized with the key findings summarized below.

FINDINGS
IMPACT: Has InspireNet made a difference and how? What is the change?

All participants were asked if their use of InspireNet impacted their work and how. While some respondents reported it had impacted their work and described how, other respondents said that InspireNet had not changed their work or had only changed their work in limited ways.

Respondents citing no or little impact noted that they saw potential and some possibilities, but that they were not engaged enough in the network for it to have made a difference.

Respondents who did feel that InspireNet had made an impact in their work provided a variety of ways in which it had made a difference. Because members come from different backgrounds,

with various professional responsibilities and personal interests, interviews revealed impacts across four main areas: research and academic work; teaching and student engagement; professional practice; and education and school work.

Impact Area 1: Research and Academic Work

The impact of InspireNet on members' research and academic work was evident in the interview data. How and to what end InspireNet impacted research work is categorized into four theme areas, summarized in Figure 4 and below.
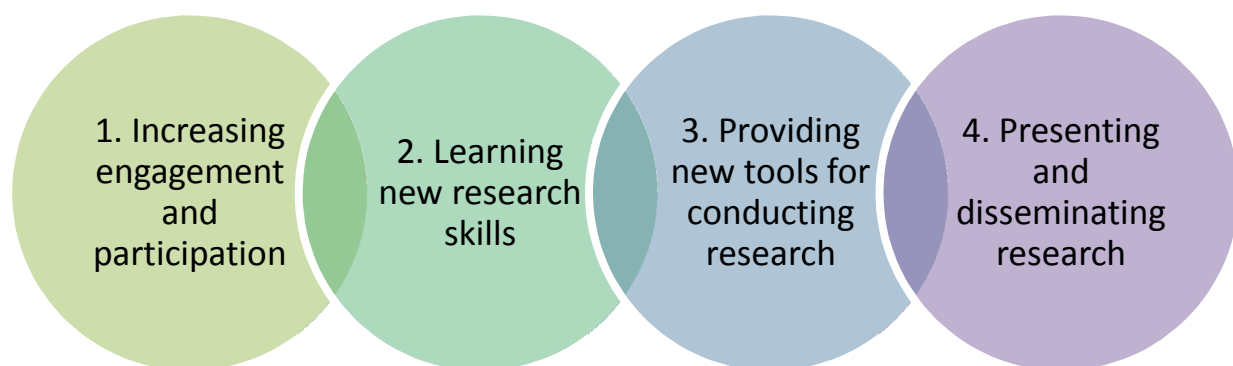

Figure 4: Four major theme areas in research and academic work

1. Increasing engagement and participation in the research process.

> *It allowed us to build those partnerships that were in different sectors. So some people in health care and some in post-secondary, and so the virtual platform just allowed us to be able to do that… allowed for broader collaboration and being able to incorporate a broad range of stakeholders, both researchers and clinicians and educators and policy-makers into our research team.*
>
> Interview Participant 18 (Team Leader)

One of the strongest impact areas to emerge was the increased ability to engage team members and project partners. Networking capabilities allowed teams to be more inclusive and diverse. Interview participants noted that using the virtual platform and tools increased their ability to reach out and connect with more colleagues. As a result, members cited this enabled more stakeholder involvement, more cross-institution and cross-sector collaborations, and more opportunities for grad students to participate in research.

The tools also created more opportunities for team members to participate in meetings and team work, both synchronously and asynchronously. Interview participants noted that the platform tools enabled them to write and edit documents during meetings and use that process to share updates across the team. Participants also noted that scheduling virtual meetings is easier and less expensive than face-

to-face meetings where people have to travel. Asynchronously, the InspireNet platform allowed members to store and access meeting and research materials all in one place. Not only does this help keep projects organized, it also enables greater access to materials across project team members. Synchronous and asynchronous tools also created opportunities for collaboration across geographical and time boundaries.

Participants indicated that the overall impact created from using these online networking and meetings tools was more discussion and input from team members and more engagement and

> *We had proposals going, and at one point I remember we had a person in Toronto, someone else in the U.S., someone else in Saskatchewan and someone in Vancouver. And we were all at different conferences and such, but we could still work together. And that would not have happened as effectively, if we had had to use e-mail and downloading…it was a much better use of our time.*
>
> Interview Participant 7 (Survey Volunteer)

participation from stakeholders. There was also a strong recognition and appreciation for the tools making meeting and project work more time-efficient. By decreasing barriers, and creating new and easy ways to participate, InspireNet has increased the efficiency of the research process resulting in more engagement and input.

2. Learning new research skills.

The interview findings also provided evidence of InspireNet providing research skills development and mentorship opportunities between members. As a participant noted, the online platform provides a new way of thinking about mentorship, that it does not have to be just one-on-one, but also can be a group process. Another member noted that there are many opportunities to gain new skills and learn about research just by seeing what other members do and how they organize and run their projects.

> *It certainly has taught me a lot of how other people are organizing webinars, organizing their research, what other people are working on in relation to the research, and it certainly has informed my practice, and assisted the other people that I support in their practice*
>
> Interview Participant 15 (Survey Volunteer)

These findings demonstrate the cross-learning opportunities made available by InspireNet and the impact it has had on the development of health services research skills in BC.

3. Providing new tools for conducting research.

Interviews' findings provided examples of how members are using the online platform to conduct research and detailed the opportunities and challenges of doing so. Participants noted that the web-conferencing services available via InspireNet provided a good alternative for face-to-face data collection and made scheduling interviews and focus groups with participants easier. One of the challenges cited with this method was the potential for technical issues (such as audio) interrupting or delaying data collection activities.

Overall, however, these examples indicate the new potential channels offered by InspireNet for members to conduct their studies and collect data.

4. Presenting and disseminating information.

> *The ability of InspireNet to reach people across the province far surpasses what you are able to do in person.*
>
> Interview Participant 12 (Survey Volunteer)

The online platform and the ability to network with such a wide group of members provided members with new methods of presenting and disseminating information in a cost-effective manner. As a result, members feel as if the reach of their messages is extended beyond what would otherwise be possible.

Overall research impacts and outcomes

One of the biggest impacts on the research process is increased time efficiency. By using the different tools, detailed group work can be coordinated outside of scheduled team meetings at times convenient for each person, saving actual meeting times for group discussion and decision making. Cost-efficiency was noted as an impact, as the online platform reduced the need for travel and travel-related meeting expenses. Additionally, InspireNet has increased the inclusion of and input from members across institutional, time and geographical barriers. It has provided an online space for members from different backgrounds to participate in projects enabling more diverse teams and more collaboration opportunities. Overall, this has permitted more engagement and participation in the entire research process leading to richer idea generation, proposal development, data collection, and dissemination. It has provided an example of how an online platform can be used in research and spurred other projects using different platforms. And, in some cases it has even made the research possible.

> *…[InspireNet's electronic platform] made the actual work possible because I'm not sure that we would have been able to complete projects in the time that was allotted without the platform, because people wouldn't have been able to meet in person. It wouldn't have been as cost effective. And it provided an organizing structure around which work could happen.*
>
> Interview Participant 5 (Key Informant)

Impact Area 2: Teaching and Student Engagement

Participants with teaching responsibilities cited that they had used InspireNet resources with their students. For example, some brought findings back from conferences to share with their students. Others encouraged their students to use InspireNet as a resource to support their own work in class and also used e-posters to share student research.

One participant noted that she has used the InspireNet platform to facilitate research work with students.

> *Me and students working together with practicing nurses, collecting data and seeing those collaborations and having those discussions, and all of those things... I think it's broken down some barriers.*
>
> Interview Participant 3 (Key Informant)

Through these activities, InspireNet has opened up more opportunities and possibilities for students to engage in research. It has become an additional teaching tool for members to demonstrate and teach the importance of health services research in BC.

Impact Area 3: Professional Practice

Within the practice setting, some participants reported that using InspireNet and its resources impacted their work, while others reported that it had not changed their work practices. For those who felt as if InspireNet has made an impact on their work, changes at the individual and the workplace levels were indicated. At the individual level, some interview respondents noted that their participation in InspireNet had changed the way they think about research and its application to practice. It put the concept of evidence-based practice into action and provoked more inquiry.

> *I don't know if I could say specifically it has changed my day-to-day work, but certainly it's brought the whole idea of research and evidence-based practice and all those kind of things, it has made me think about it more.*
>
> Interview Participant 10 (Survey Volunteer)

For others, it impacted their role and their facilitation skills. InspireNet provided them with tools, strategies and information that they could pass on and use to support clinical and

leadership teams in their workplaces. For other respondents, in non-clinical roles, InspireNet's resources provided a valuable connection to practice.

Some participants noted that there were limits or barriers to InspireNet changing their practice. It was noted this was mainly due to InspireNet's focus and content not fitting with their role or work.

In terms of impact and change in the workplace, participants noted that InspireNet had some influence via sharing resources and inviting colleagues to webinars. One participant cited an example of using content found on InspireNet's website to spur the development of a new workplace competency.

> *One of my first experiences was when the competencies came out. And we passed that around as well, because that was something really new and exciting, to understand competency in health informatics. And actually we sort of geared that even towards where I work -- in terms of tele-nurse competencies. So we used the framework that was developed, and kind of tailored it a little bit to tele-nursing.*
>
> Interview Participant 19 (Survey Volunteer)

Impact Area 4: Education and School Work

> *If I can tell you one thing about InspireNet is that it was actually the reason that I got into a double master's program at UVic.*
>
> Interview Participant 8 (Survey Volunteer)

A couple of interview respondents described how InspireNet had supported or impacted their education and school work.

For the few participants who noted that InspireNet did impact their education, this included having access to resources and providing connection to others to inform school work. And for one InspireNet member, InspireNet inspired the pursuit of a graduate degree.

Other Skills Gained

In addition to impacting the different core areas of work, some participants noted that their participation in InspireNet increased their knowledge and skills of the technology available across the platform. Specifically, in a few interviews, participants noted that through InspireNet they learned to use the web-conferencing platform Cisco WebEx, something new and challenging at first. Also mentioned was the introduction of e-posters and learning about that new modality as a way to present and share research findings.

More generally, a few participants noted how learning to use the InspireNet platform made it easier to learn and manage other platforms. It created a knowledge and skills base that could be transferred into other areas and contributed to their overall professional development.

> *It has really pushed me into becoming much more knowledgeable about the kinds of ways that you can utilize technology. And like e-posters. Wow. I mean I never knew about e-posters. And so now I know many other areas are really interested in it.*
>
> Interview Participant 17 (Key Informant)

> *… I was pretty much of a luddite starting this process… I'm way more technically savvy and way more engaged in, not only this, but many, many, many online and virtual environments. So it's been a great professional development thing for me.*
>
> Interview Participant 3 (Key Informant)

VALUE: How and why should InspireNet continue?

Overall value of InspireNet

The value interview participants saw in InspireNet came through responses in many ways when answering questions about their use and its impact over the years. All participants (survey volunteers, key informants and team leaders) provided value statements about InspireNet. Figure 5 and the text below detail the five major value added pieces InspireNet brings to health services research in BC.

One resource	Vehicle for engagement	Filling a need	Momentum	A way of life
• InspireNet is the one provincial resource for all health professionals	• InspireNet is a resource and vehicle to engage in research activities	• InspireNet is filling a gap and there is an interest and demand for it	• InspireNet has the momentum to keep on growing	• Virtual and online engagement is becoming a way of life

Figure 5: Five major value added pieces of InspireNet

1. InspireNet is one central provincial resource for health professionals in BC.

Many comments from interview participants spoke to the value of InspireNet being an open and inclusive network and the website the "one place to go to" for health professionals in BC. As a provincial resource, welcoming all institutions and organizations, there is no perceived ownership or boundaries between the academic and clinical worlds.

Fostering an open and inclusive environment has contributed to the diversity of the membership and has provided a platform for researchers, clinicians and policymakers to connect. It has become an open invitation to other working and retired professionals that may not have access to these tools and types of resources otherwise. InspireNet provides that home and connection for all members to come together.

InspireNet is seen as a reputable and trusted resource providing access to valuable and credible information. It provides members with links to the provincial, national and global nursing worlds.

> *One of the things that I found really valuable is connecting people from all diverse locations who had never connected. It really helped. And across agencies, health authorities, geographic locations, who I don't think necessarily would have come together unless this platform existed.*
>
> Interview Participant 7 (Survey Volunteer)

> *It has been an invaluable resource for not only nursing, but for other professions too. To be able to collaborate online and spread information and disseminate education across the province, it has really been something that I have never seen in my 35 year career in nursing that has been able to be this successful and have this many participants.*
>
> Interview Participant 12 (Survey Volunteer)

Further, many interview participants noted that the online platform makes it convenient and easy to access information and resources anytime or anywhere.

As a recognized and respected provincial resource, it is clear InspireNet is an effective interprofessional network fostering cross-institution and cross-sector collaboration, education and dissemination opportunities.

2. InspireNet is a vehicle to engage in health services research activities across the continuum.

Interview participants provided many examples of InspireNet inspiring and supporting research activities across the research continuum.

> *Having a platform available was really important to build the research team, and also more efficient and effective use of resources and research funding.*
>
> Interview Participant 18 (Closed Team Leader)

For members just getting a project started, this included connecting with researchers, developing partnerships, finding experts in the field to work with or learn from, and building research teams.

For others this meant using the platform to aid in idea formation and socialization (i.e. getting feedback on ideas, developing ideas with other researchers). An Action Team also used the platform to support a project team putting together a grant application the proposal writing process.

> *Having access to InspireNet for all the resources, for facilitating dialogue, has been incredibly beneficial to keeping the work moving.*
>
> Interview Participant 22 (Team Leader)

The platform has been used to host meetings and save all project related documentations in one spot for all members to access, anytime, anywhere. It has become a space for project members to work asynchronously between meetings. As participants noted, having this platform and these options for participation not only increased engagement from those not usually available to participate, but it also propelled the work.

Some participants shared that they had used tools from the platform, such as the web-conferencing service, to aid in data collection activities such as interviews and focus groups. Those who had used these methods noted the efficiency in time and cost in comparison to face-to-face methods.

And, for the final stage of the research cycle/knowledge translation, many interview participants noted the opportunities afforded by InspireNet to disseminate research findings. This included not only hosting live webinars to share project results, but also having a repository of archived recordings that can be accessed by others at a later time. This channel of dissemination has extended the reach and spread of research findings.

All of these examples provide evidence of InspireNet's value and impact on sparking interest in and opportunities for health services research across the province. Work is able to be completed and enriched by participation from more members. As one member noted, more research will produce more results which will improve patient outcomes.

> *…it's been really helpful I think in terms of sparking a lot more interest in research and scholarships, and that leads to hopefully research that allows us to say yes, this is working well, this provides … excellent outcomes for the public.*
>
> Interview Participant 23 (Survey Volunteer)

3. InspireNet is filling a gap and there is an interest and demand for it.

> *Researchers want to use it in the research proposals … but clinicians are hungering for the information as quickly as possible, or contact, or learning, and InspireNet allowed them to do that.*
>
> Interview Participant 7 (Survey Volunteer)

As one participant noted, "*there was always a need for nursing research, but this really ignited that flame.*" Beyond revealing that need, InspireNet has overcome the barriers for interprofessional clinical research. It has provided a point of engagement and a method to meet. It is bringing front line clinicians into the research process. It is linking nurse educators with practice and research. And, it is providing people without affiliations to institutions or organizations an 'in'. InspireNet is bringing research information to those who want it, and for many of them, this is the only way for them to access that information.

InspireNet is providing an essential service for health services research collaboration in BC. This is a unique network that overcomes some of the barriers created by institutions and organizations working in silos (or in isolation of each other). There is no other platform like InspireNet or an alternative method to bring the same diversity of participants, willing and wanting to be engaged, together for research.

> *I think, for me, it's quite critical, because I don't work for any of the institutions. I am an independent person and I am retired. And so I'm very much engaged in working in a variety of contexts, and this bridge, this portal, this whole network has been critical to my engagement with colleagues. Without it, it would be very difficult. And I think that's becoming more and more apparent to not only me, but other people as well, because we need the portal to support the research across BC and the Northwest Territories.*
>
> Interview Participant 14 (Key Informant)

4. InspireNet has momentum to keep going.

The online networking platform that InspireNet has become today has been evolving over the past five years. In that time it has built up an interested and engaged group of core members. Those members have become familiar with this platform and have developed the skills needed to use the technology. Through trial and error, they have found what works for their needs. And while there are many successes to note, there is also the recognition that more time is needed to fully see and understand the benefits across the network. Some of the interview participants warned about scaling down or not sustaining the network past the current funding as it would be very difficult to re-engage and re-build the membership back up to where it is currently.

InspireNet has already invested a lot of effort into building what it has become. While some of the benefits and results of that work are already emerging, more opportunities and potential is seen and can be capitalized on over time. This is particularly relevant with the recent shift from nursing to interprofessional focused health services research.

5. Online engagement is becoming a way of life.

Some interview participants noted that the InspireNet platform and tools capitalize on what people are already using and doing in their personal life and virtual networks are now being implemented in other professional contexts (i.e. universities, health authorities, etc.).

One thing with a virtual platform, I think it takes a while for people to find it and find its usefulness. And we may only just be seeing the tip of the iceberg. If it had another five years to go, I think we'd see real utilization of it. So I think if it were to end at this point in time, it would be a real loss, because even though we've made great gains in terms of how we use it, and where we're at there still could be much more -- more use of it, and more connection.

Interview Participant 11 (Key Informant)

As technology continues to develop, this way of working will become standard in the future. InspireNet has been at the forefront and can be used as a successful example of how to connect and work online.

I think it's becoming more and more a way of life. So now I think to not have a virtual environment to support networking would be a huge loss, because it's almost -- even whether we're in an urban or a rural setting, it's become a way of life now.

Interview Participant 11 (Key Informant)

ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS- LESSONS LEARNED: What did members learn about working in online environments?

In the interviews, all participants were asked what they had learned or what had surprised them about working in an online environment. Responses are summarized below, with specific lessons from the team leaders pulled out separately.

Lessons learned for conducting webinars

As past evaluation results have shown, the webinar series is a popular dissemination activity in InspireNet. Through their experience, interview participants cited the following lessons learned about hosting a successful webinar:

- Preparation: Setting up a webinar requires a lot of communication and advertising to get people interested in attending.
- Comfort: The host has to be comfortable with the technology and be able to use it effectively.
- Animation: People with more animated personalities or communication styles do better in the online presentation.
- Visuals: Using the technology, such as a webcam, animating slides, and including visuals like pictures increases interest and engagement of the audience.

> *I think that what I've learned is that there needs to be a lot of preparation, a lot of advertising, to get people interested, excited, buying in, wanting to be part of it.*
>
> Interview Participant 15 (Survey Volunteer)

Lessons learned about using an electronic platform

Interview participants also shared some of the things that they learned or that surprised them when working in the electronic environment.

1. Resistance

Some of the interview participants noted that some people will be resistant to change and will want to continue doing things the way they have always been done. For some, it's hard to switch the mindset of how things are done to how they could be done. One cited example included file sharing via emails versus file sharing via the wiki in the eCoP. To overcome this, one interview participant noted that in the beginning she would deliberately duplicate or cross-post emails to help ease users in.

2. Frustration

Some interview participants noted that some members will get frustrated early on and give up. They observed that some users will be more ready than others to participate in the online environment. One interview participant specifically noted that students/ recent graduates are more ready than older and/or retired members.

To ease the frustration, users need to be taught how to use the tools and then coached while using them. Participants spoke to the need to have someone central to provide sophisticated and intensive support to users.

> *Now the other thing that I've learned is the kinds of sophisticated support that's necessary in order to move it along, and that provided by [the manager]. So, I think it little bit surprised me was just how intensive and sophisticated and skillful the support needs to be.*
>
> Interview Participant 13 (Key Informant)

3. The learning curve is big

> *In the beginning we, you know initially getting used to the platform and everything, it was a learning curve, it was big learning curve. I think the help from [the manager] has been invaluable. And what I found, personally, was I just needed to engage with it and figure it out.*

Interview participants noted that for many there is a big learning curve in the beginning. To get over the curve, members need support and need to just work with the technology. They suggested that members learning to use the technology need to use it consistently to remember how to use it.

Once over the curve, participants noted, as comfort and familiarity with the technology increases, so does use and enjoyment.

4. Engagement is difficult

Interview participants noted that it is difficult to engage people in an online environment and that more work needs to be done to really understand how to foster community engagement beyond a few key leaders and teams. One interview participant shared that adding the human element (for example, pictures of team members, blogs, etc.) did help increase engagement. Another interview participant suggested that maybe the way 'engagement' is thought of needs to change when working in an online environment, and members many not contribute and respond in the same manner as they would through other means.

Lessons from the team leaders

The team leaders fulfill a unique role in InspireNet. Each was responsible for leading and managing a virtual team. Below is a summary of the lessons they learned in their role.

The need to support project organization

One of the first noted lessons was the importance of having a centralized location for project documentation. Team leader interview participants spoke to the convenience and efficiency of having a centralized, consistent resource, with everything accessible in one spot. While this had many benefits, participants noted it required additional assistance and support. Managing and keeping the information up to

> *So it reinforced the importance of having one location where the research team is able to go to be able to connect, and provide documentation, and to track and to find resources all in a central location… But then in doing that, we learned that we also need additional support through a research coordinator or assistant of some kind, to be able to manage those administrative pieces.*
>
> Interview Participant 18 (Closed Team Leader)

date and organized is a time consuming task.

> *I have to really think about how I structure -- how much information to put in an email that invites people to come. I need to embed the hyperlinks so that it's as few clicks as possible. And I have to make it visually appealing. And I have to make it short enough the key message comes across in both the subject heading so that that email is actually opened. And also then in the content so that it's not any more than a 10 second read.*
>
> Interview Participant 21 (Closed Team Leader)

The efficiency in creating meeting artifacts

Interview participants noted that features of the platform eased communication by facilitating documentation. Meetings hosted using the web-conferencing tool can be easily recorded and transcribed. Similarly the wiki tool can be used to produce collaborative documents during the meeting and then be saved and accessible to all members at a later time. The team leaders found this to be an efficient and effective way to engage and capture member input.

The use of social marketing to engage members

Some of the team leaders spoke to principles and forethought that went into communications with team members. One leader specifically spoke to her use of social marketing principles when drafting emails and sending out reminders. This included thinking about how to structure the information so it could (and would) be read easily and selectively choosing what to share and when. She was very cognizant of members being 'click averse' (i.e. not clicking through hyperlinks and logins to find information), so would carefully and thoughtfully construct messages. To engage members and ensure that they read emails she suggested sending and sharing information that is catchy and easy to read and understand.

Overall take away lessons

Interview participant feedback about networking and doing research activities in an online environment culminated into three main take away messages. These are presented in Figure 6 below.
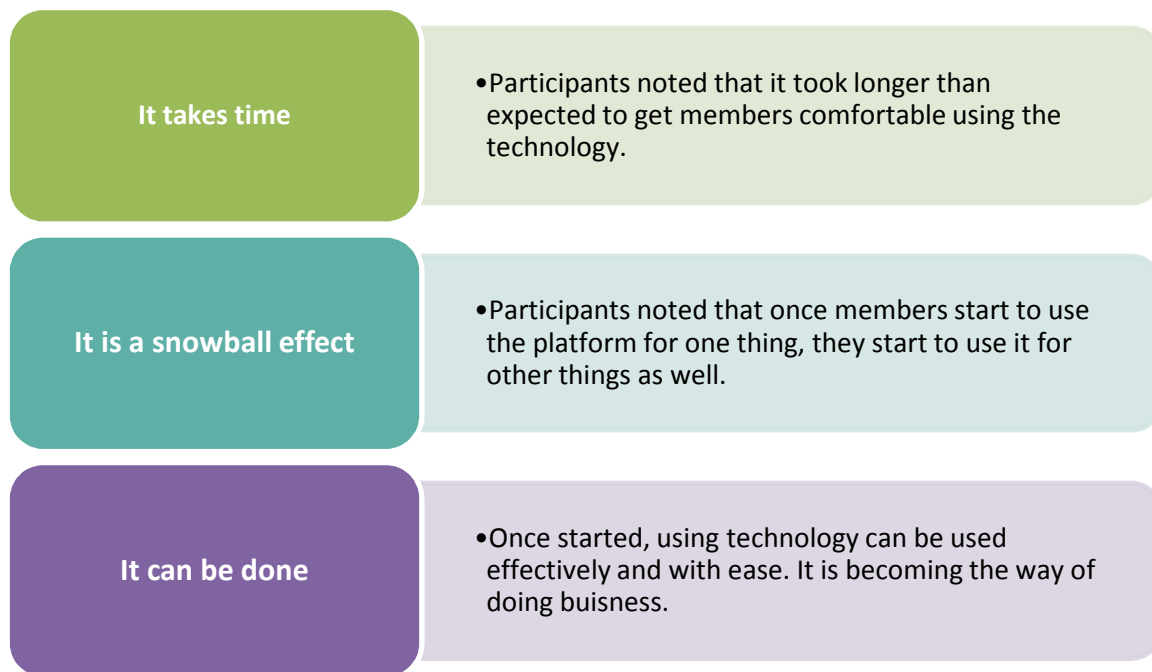
It takes time	• Participants noted that it took longer than expected to get members comfortable using the technology.
It is a snowball effect	• Participants noted that once members start to use the platform for one thing, they start to use it for other things as well.
It can be done	• Once started, using technology can be used effectively and with ease. It is becoming the way of doing buisness.

Figure 6: Overall take away messages about working in an online environment

What was also really encouraging is once people got to know InspireNet and had the experience, they are looking at it for other reasons as well. So once you start to get in to the platform, you know, people started to look around and start to be engaged in other aspects of InspireNet.

Interview Participant 22 (Closed Team Leader)

DISCUSSION OF INTERVIEW FINDINGS
Impact

Findings from the final interviews confirmed what previous InspireNet evaluations hinted at - InspireNet has had an impact on members who use the platform. The four main impact areas to emerge were research and academic work; teaching and student engagement; professional practice; and education and school work. While not every interview participant experienced an impact in each of these areas, those who did provided rich examples of how the platform was used to support and change their work. This insight provides a better understanding of how InspireNet can be successfully used and the potential it has to impact other members.

Value

The value of what InspireNet provides and the potential for what it can become came through clearly and loudly in interview participants' responses. As one provincial resource for health professionals across BC, InspireNet is seen as central to fostering cross-institutional and cross-sector work. InspireNet crosses many boundaries - professional and geographical. Because it is so open and inclusive, it has built up a truly diverse membership made up of academics, clinicians, administrators and policy makers. Providing connections between these groups offers limitless networking and partnership opportunities to members.

Interview participants provided insight into how valuable the InspireNet platform has been in supporting health services research activities. Examples provided in the interviews demonstrated that InspireNet has contributed to the development, implementation and dissemination of research. From increased participation from project team members, to conducting focus groups, to presenting findings, members have used the tools and opportunities afforded by the network to enrich their research.

A need has been recognized and ignited by InspireNet. In offering new methods for interprofessional collaboration and research, InspireNet is filling a gap. It is providing a point of engagement and a network of support to individuals seeking ways to be involved in research.

Now in its sixth year, many of the participants noted InspireNet has gained momentum to keep on going. A lot of time and effort has already been put in up front, and while there have been many successes along the way, there is a sense among members that this is only the beginning. Many of the outcomes and benefits are yet to be seen as they will take time to emerge.

Finally, as online engagement becomes a way of life, InspireNet provides a great example of what that can look like. It has introduced and adapted to changing technology over the years to efficiently and effectively facilitate member networking and collaboration. As other organizations begin to introduce similar virtual networks, InspireNet will remain one of the first and most established ones.

Lessons learned

From working in a primarily online environment, findings from the interviews revealed lessons learned in three main areas: webinars, the electronic platform and virtual research team facilitation. The overall realizations about online engagement to emerge were: (a) it takes time to build comfort using the technology; (b) it can be done effectively and with ease; and (c) it is a snowball effect and once members start using the platform for one thing, they start using it for other things as well.

Limitations

The themes presented in this report are pulled from interview findings with 22 InspireNet members. These participants were selected for interview recruitment based on their willingness to participate in evaluation activities (i.e. survey volunteers), or the role that they hold in InspireNet (i.e. key informants and team leaders). It is likely that these InspireNet members and their experiences do not represent the full 3,700+ membership. The findings do, however, provide an indication of the impact the network has had on a select group of members in the province. Their perspectives provide insight into how the network has been used and how it can impact health services research work.

These results can be put into context with the 90-9-1 rule[4]. This rule is based upon evidence that member engagement in social networks follows a distinct pattern of participation. Specifically, it states that members within a network tend to fall into one of three user groups at the stated proportion: lurkers/ audience (90%), contributors/ editors (9%) and super-users/ creators (1%). As active users, the participants from this evaluation are mostly likely contributors and super-users. Nonetheless, they are the ones using the network to support their work and they are the ones benefiting from InspireNet the most. Understanding their patterns of use and the impact on their work can provide insight into how better to support those active members and how to build capacity and engagement opportunities to support the others.

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[4] van Mierlo, T. (2014). The 1% Rule in Four Digital Health Social Networks: An observational study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 16(2).

PART 2: EVALUATION COORDINATING TEAM FOCUS GROUP

METHODS

Members of the Evaluation Coordinating Team (ECT) were invited to participate in a focus group. The ECT members have had a strong leadership role in the development and evaluation of InspireNet. Their unique perspective and insights can inform sustainability planning. All six ECT members participated.

The focus group protocol was drafted by the external evaluation team (UBC eHealth Strategy Office) and sent around to ECT members for input. The protocol included seven semi-structured questions to get members to reflect on their experiences, lessons learned and thoughts about the development of InspireNet overtime. In July 2014 the focus group was conducted via web-conferencing and was recorded to aid in data analysis.

Notes taken during the focus group were organized and summarized by question. The results were then sent to the focus group participants for validation. Key findings are presented below.

FINDINGS

IMPACT: Has InspireNet changed the members' work?

Participants were asked if and how InspireNet changed their professional work as an academic or practitioner. Responses provided by participants indicated that InspireNet had impacted their work in both general and specific ways. Figure 7 illustrates the four main benefit areas.
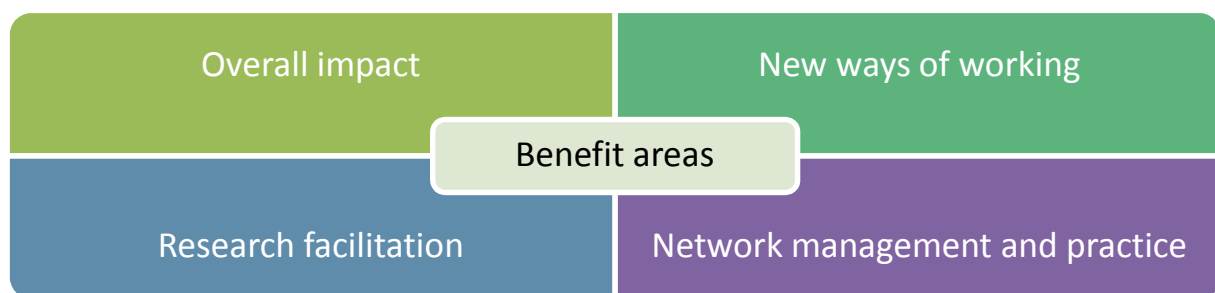

Figure 7: Four main benefit areas

1. Overall benefits and changes

Participants noted a few general ways in which InspireNet had impacted their work. InspireNet provided members an introduction to working in an electronic environment and technology to enable professional work. It provided participants the ability to interact with colleagues and partners, in turn enhancing relationships and allowing the network to accomplish more. Over time, participants noted, came the realization that meeting and working online is different than

meeting in the office. Within the electronic environment, not only was travel time and money saved, it also became easier to integrate work and meetings into the day.

2. Benefits and changes to new ways of working

> *Since I've worked with this network it has completely changed the way I want to work.*
>
> Focus Group Participant 1

Benefits and changes to ways of work were also noted by participants. Specifically, participants spoke to the impact of InspireNet's ability to facilitate connections with other members. For example, the network provided a new channel to learn about others' work and disseminate research findings, it brought people with similar interests together over distances, and it connected members with experts in the field.

Other benefits to academic work included the ability of InspireNet to offer news way of documenting and sharing meetings and discussions (i.e. recordings, not note taking). Participants cited the use of the recordings for teaching and professional development opportunities and also spoke to the substantive bank of information built up over time which is sharable both within and outside of the network.

Finally, participants discussed building the skills and capacity for using technology in their work which led to more technology use overall. This included using the technology to support research teams' work (e.g. keeping materials together, recording meetings, etc.).

3. Benefits to and changes in the practice of Nursing Research Facilitators

Participants discussed how the InspireNet network and tools transformed the way Nursing Research Facilitators (NRF)[5] worked. They spoke of InspireNet building capacity for health services and nursing research within each health authority by enabling connections, building relationships and providing a new way of working together. It helped the NRF build the skills needed for using the technology to run meetings, record sessions and share and post documents.

4. Benefits to and changes in the practice and management of networks

As a final benefit area, InspireNet had an impact of participants' understanding and practice of the management of online network. For example, some participants cited

> *I think it's solidified thinking that I had earlier around if you want to do a network at a provincial or national level, it's critical that you've got capable network management, you've got a solid leadership model, and you've got a strategy. And you're evaluating it.*
>
> Focus Group Participant 3

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[5] Nursing Research Facilitators were a complementary program funded through MSFHR'S BCNRI 2010-2014).

that InspireNet helped them keep up to date with new technology (e.g. Drupal, WebEx). For some, it helped them better understand the technophobe attitude and the methods to coach other members through the fear and anxiety of using technology.

Being a part of InspireNet and its development over time changed the way some participants approached and thought about how networks can function at the provincial and national level. Seeing how InspireNet worked made participants realize the need to embrace and use electronic platforms and tools.

Finally, because of their participation in the development of the network, focus group members said they were able to see the need for strong network management, an engaged leadership team and overall implementation strategy that includes an evaluation component.

EXPERIENCES: What are the most rewarding and challenging experiences in InspireNet?

> *The challenging part   is a tiny little piece, and the rewarding part is a great big piece.*
>
> Focus Group Participant 2

Participants were asked to discuss the most rewarding and challenging experiences they had with InspireNet. Overall, most of the positive experiences related to seeing the network and members grow over time, building up a strong and effective leadership team, and participating in the evaluation of the network. Getting people interested and engaged in participating were some of the challenges members faced.

Reaping rewards

For ECT members involved in the development and implementation of InspireNet, watching the growth of the network exceed expectations in terms of the number of members, number of eCoPS and number of research teams was cited as a rewarding experience. In their roles, they were in a position to see connections and enthusiasm develop between members. As members themselves, they too had the ability to connect and work with new colleagues and experts for continuous learning and professional development opportunities. Satisfaction was found in being a part of a group doing such cutting-edge work.

> *We never really dreamed it would be this big. We never really thought we would have so many eCoPs. And it's been hugely rewarding to see those research teams come along that say we want to do our work this way.*
>
> Focus Group Participant 1

Another source of satisfaction discussed in the focus group was helping members build technology capacity. For the network manager, coaching members through their fears and anxiety during their first few sessions and then seeing them develop the skills and confidence to use the tools was a rewarding experience.

Participants spoke about how rewarding evaluating the progress and growth of InspireNet and its members over the years has been. Participants found working with an external evaluation team to develop and execute an evaluation plan a valuable experience. Participants cited being able to collect and track network activity and see the number of visits/ hits on different materials and posts increase rewarding.

Seeing and working with such an effective and successful leadership team model in practice was discussed as a rewarding aspect of participating in InspireNet. Participants noted that the Leadership Team was very engaged, active and serious, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Participants suggest two contributing factors to this success were that the Leadership Team model was developed with the guidance of a consultant, and that the Leadership Team was working with such a skilled network manager. Together this created a positive experience for participants to be a part of.

> *Not only the two leaders, but the whole team in InspireNet, changed not only the way that I lead, but changed even thinking— my attitudes and values – around collaborative work. Even though it is distant work, still it is collaborative work.*
>
> Focus Group Participant 4

Finally, participants said they found it very rewarding to see InspireNet succeed in achieving its stated goals and to have the evidence and the anecdotes to support those accomplishments.

Encountering challenges

While participants had cited coaching members through their fears and anxiety in using technology as a rewarding experience, it was also described as a challenging aspect of participating in an online network. While the outcome of seeing a member develop the skills and confidence to use the technology and tools is satisfying, participants also found it challenging to know that the technology may be deterring potential members and users from becoming more engaged.

One of the other challenges shared in the focus group was "selling" the idea of an online network to external partners who are not interested or connected to InspireNet. Participants noted that it was frustrating at times knowing that some people or potential members do not see the value added of the electronic platform. They noted that some people cannot see how it can enable and enhance dissemination, collaboration and accessibility to other researchers.

The engagement of members to be leaders of teams and activities was a challenge discussed in the focus group. Participants noted that at times it was difficult to get a commitment from members who take on leadership roles. Team leaders need to be involved and engaged to facilitate team activities and keep active, and without committed leaders, team work lags.

Finally, participants expressed the ongoing challenge of developing a solid sustainability plan with funding and partnerships to support the network long term. As a network funded through a MSFHR initiative, InspireNet is only supported for a limited period. To sustain beyond the funding mandate, additional support needs to be found.

COLLABORATIVE SUCCESS: What types of collaboration have been the most effective? What factors account for that success?

Participants agreed that the cross-sector collaborations have been the most effective and beneficial. As one of the goals of InspireNet, this was a requirement built into the leadership model and strategy and was implemented and executed well.

Participants stated that the spirit of collaboration was demonstrated and supported all network activities -- management, communication, expertise, leadership and evaluation.

When probed about the factors for success, participants cited four pieces. First, all participants agreed that the network manager was essential and became the "soul of the network." This role provided all network members with someone willing and able to help. The network manager was there to coach members to develop the skills they needed to participate and take advantage of the technology offered.

Another factor for success was the Nursing Research Facilitators. Participants stated the facilitators were the "boots on the ground" in each health authority and that they provided a good complement to the network.

The Leadership Team was discussed as a factor of success. As stated above, the Leadership Team built a strong foundation and skilfully executed the vision of InspireNet.

Finally, participants made a point of mentioning the shear composition of the membership (mostly nurses) is collaborative by trade. As a professional group, nurses are very teamwork oriented and this network may be a group of self-selected collaborators.

> *You can't collaborate if you don't have people who are willing to. I think we have an understanding that we are all different, and the more diverse we are, the better we can be, because we can work together well.*
>
> Focus Group Participant 1

MARKERS OF SUCCESS: What are the turning points in the InspireNet journey?

When asked to recall specific times or events that could be considered turning points throughout their involvement in InspireNet, participants provided a variety of answers.

Some of the key turning points for participants were specific activities. These included seeing someone take on and set up the first Action Team; running their first webinar; having a good turnout the one of the first eHealth eCoP presentations; and realizing the growing interest in the webinar series.

Another key turning point for participants was the Health Services Researcher Pathway project[6]. This project idea came from InspireNet, and all of the project work was done virtually with a large group, short timeline and many stakeholders. It was a demonstration of the possibilities and outcomes of virtual research and collaboration.

> *There is no possible way we could have done it [the Researcher Pathway project] without using a virtual environment. There was no option to bring such a diverse geographically dispersed team together in an efficient way without using the platform.*
>
> Focus Group Participant 3

Some participants saw certain administrative events as turning. One of these events included the first leadership meeting in November 2010 when one team member suggested InspireNet membership could reach 3000. Membership is now at 3,700. Another turning point suggested by a participant is the compilation of all the annual reports and seeing the growth in membership and member representation across the reports. The multiple funding extensions from MSFHR were suggested as key turning points as they show that the funder is supportive and interested in what the network is doing and that they want InspireNet to be successful.

Finally, evaluation output was discussed as a turning point. Participants cited the overall body of knowledge and evidence amassed through evaluation activities as important milestones for InspireNet. Further, the evaluation team activities over time (e.g. surveys, interviews, focus

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[6] The HSRP project, commissioned by MSFHR is documented on their website: http://www.msfhr.org/health-services-researcher-pathway-0

groups) were suggested to be key turning points which have tracked and showcased everything the network has achieved.

DISCUSSION OF FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Impact

Participants recounted various ways in which their involvement as leaders and members in InspireNet impacted their work. Overall, there were four main benefits areas. First, InspireNet provided the participants with an introduction to working in an online environment. Through this experience, members gained insight into the nuances of working electronically. They were able to discern the advantages and differences from working in a face-to-face context.

Another impact area reported was research and academic work. Participants' involvement in InspireNet increased their connections to other researchers, provided access to more professional development opportunities and helped them build up new skills for using technology.

Participants discussed InspireNet's impact on the Nursing Research Facilitators. InspireNet was seen as enabling the NRFs' work and contributing to research capacity development in the province. Specifically, InspireNet provided the NRF with a new way of working and connecting with others.

Finally, being involved in InspireNet impacted participants' understanding of how online networks can be successfully managed. Through their roles and experiences, participants noted that they have seen how online networking can be optimized and used at the provincial and national level.

Experiences

Rewarding

When asked to recount the most rewarding experiences in InspireNet, participants provided examples of gratifying aspects of their participation. Many of these recollections included watching the growth of the network and its members. Being a part of the evaluation process really provided these members with an ongoing, inside look at the progress and success of InspireNet over time.

Challenging

Participants were asked to recall the challenges. Some of the challenges recounted included "selling" the idea of an online network to others who were not interested or engaged. This was

something confronted when coaching members to get over their technology fears and when planning for the sustainability of the network.

Collaborative Success

Participants spoke to the collaborative spirit that ran through all InspireNet activities. The reasons for this success included both member characteristics, network roles (such as the network manager and NRF) and strong leadership.

Turning Points for InspireNet

From the perspective of the participants, there were many events that can be seen as turning points for InspireNet. These include the growth in interest in specific activities over time (such as the webinars), the completion of projects done entirely online (such as the Health Services Researcher Pathway project), administrative meetings and reports that document the operational milestones reached, and the amassed evaluation output that has captured the achievements and impacts of the network over the years.

Limitations

The findings from the focus group with the ECT members come from a unique perspective. These individuals have invested a lot of time and interest in seeing and experiencing the success of InspireNet. While these results may not be typical or representative of the majority of InspireNet members, they do provide a lot of insight into the inner workings of an online network and can be used to inform future efforts.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the final interviews and focus group was to collect data from key InspireNet members about lessons learned, and the process and overall impact of using the electronic platform for research facilitation over the past five years. While some of the results are specific to the members' roles within the network (i.e. member versus team leader versus Evaluation Coordinating Team member), there are a few overarching findings.

From the data collected, it is clear that participation in InspireNet has impacted individuals' work and activities both within and outside of the network. The electronic platform has enabled roles, provided new ways to connect and communicate with colleagues, facilitated dissemination activities, and offered professional development opportunities. It has been used to enhanced research projects and informed teaching.

One of the major themes to run throughout both sets of data is the idea of inclusivity. A major strength and value added piece that InspireNet brings is its ability to connect and foster collaborations between many different stakeholders. Members come from a variety of backgrounds and affiliations (i.e. academic institutions, health authorities) and are geographically dispersed. Without an online network like InspireNet as a 'common ground,' there would be limited opportunities for these individuals to meet and work together in such a time and cost efficient manner.

Also evident in the interview and focus group data is that InspireNet has become a living lab/ working demonstration of the opportunities and challenges of an electronic platform. By participating in the different stages of the network's development over the past five years, the interview and focus group participants were able to identify lessons learned. One of the more prevalent points to be made by participants was the importance of having a strong network manager and the appreciation of having someone skilled in that role for InspireNet. The network manager needs to be someone willing and available to provide ongoing support to members. It is a role that requires a lot of concerted effort and time.

InspireNet has introduced many of the members to new technology and to the idea of incorporating the tools into their work. This resulted in new skills being developed - not only for using the technology, but also for teaching others how to use it as well. Some participants who have coached other members to use the technology noted that it is a steep learning curve, but often, once that is overcome, use and satisfaction increase.

Another lesson realized through participating in InspireNet activities is that working and communicating online is different than face-to-face, and that it can be a superior alternative to in-person meetings. Participants noted that while some communication cues may be lost,

working in an online environment does have some distinct advantages. This included increased resource sharing, time efficiency benefits (i.e. less meeting coordination via asynchronous communication tools), and cost-savings (i.e. reduced travel).

Finally, the strength of the overall network management cannot be overlooked. Members taking part in both the interviews and the focus group spoke to how effective the Leadership Team had been in executing InspireNet's goals and fostering the collaborative nature of the network.

As a final piece in the overall five year evaluation plan, these interviews and the focus group provide evidence and examples of how InspireNet has impacted members' research and professional practice. The progressive evaluation data has slowly revealed the true value of InspireNet over time. In this last piece, new themes and concrete examples of outcomes of where and how InspireNet has made a difference finally emerged. It has taken time to get here, and it is likely that more time will be needed for the full effect and impact of the network to be seen. The growth of a network takes time. As one of the first steps, InspireNet has definitely shown its value in facilitating partnerships and fostering collaborations between new teams of stakeholders. Further, some members are using the platform to engage project team members for meetings and to conduct research activities. As these members and project teams move along the research continuum, the value of the platform deepens. Already, lessons learned and project outcomes have been identified. Moving ahead, InspireNet will continue to contribute to the improvement of health services in BC.

> *I am quite sure that people won't be able to maintain the level of engagement and involvement in terms of the research that they are undertaking, or the potential to commence further work unless this connectivity is there.*
>
> Interview Participant 14 (key Informant)