

Dances with disciplines? Practice and performance in multidisciplinary electronic patient record (EPR) research.

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Rather like archetypal stories (such as 'Dances with Wolves' or 'Avatar') that feature individuals who embark on adventures and are changed by their exposure to natives, social scientists and others have to negotiate new ways of working within the multidisciplinary team. Multidisciplinary research is valued for drawing on multiple knowledge bases to redefine problems and processes and to reach new understandings and solutions. Designing a project so that the practice and performance of various disciplines are truly interactive and interdependent rather than just parallel work-packages should offer maximum benefit but can be challenging to plan and implement successfully. A new research team brings a new set of challenges, potential barriers and facilitating factors to the table, all operating within a technologically dense environment (TDE). In this presentation, we will describe our Patient Record Enhancement Project (PREP) - the overall aim of which is to develop strategies for making available, for research and audit purposes, medical information that is 'concealed' in the free text parts of the primary care EPR. The research involves field work studying the creation and use of the primary care EPR to better understand the contexts within which coded data and free text forms are used. We work within a highly multidisciplinary team including social scientists, epidemiologists, doctors, statisticians, computer scientists and human-computer interaction analysts who all work on various aspects of the research in different ways. Drawing on our experiences during analysis of a particular data set- on ovarian cancer- and on insights from the field studies, we will reflect on how team practice and performance is mutually shaped and influenced. We will illustrate some of the slips and some of the successes that have emerged as we strive to function efficiently as a truly interdisciplinary team that crosses traditional boundaries of practice and performance.