Knowledge Translation in Mental Health: History and Forms of a Global Imperative

History Of Medicine And Public Health

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Abstract:
Translational research is generally understood as the transformation of scientific knowledge into a product – typically a medicine in the realm of the life sciences – that will have a beneficial societal impact. The increasing convergence of biology and medicine since 1945 has contributed to orient discourses and practices surrounding biomedical research toward the quest and promise for therapeutic applications, and to give rise to what political authorities, the public, and researchers themselves tend to perceive as a translational “imperative” whose fulfillment justifies funding. One example of how such imperative has become institutionalized is the existence of such journals as Science Translational Medicine, Journal of Translational Medicine, Translational Research, American Journal of Translational Research, Translational Medicine, Clinical and Translational Medicine, or Clinical and Translational Science. As a norm of biomedical research, the translational imperative is sustained by the impression that there is a one-way flow of information from the laboratory to the clinic, and that “translational research” is the process that (as a Wellcome Trust document puts it) “helps turn early-stage innovations into new health products.” However, as Jean Harrington and Christine Hauskeller pointed out in their 2014 article “Translational Research: An Imperative Shaping the Spaces in Biomedicine,” the one-directional model “is simplistic compared to the ways in which the sociology of science and technology has been using this same concept since the 1960s;” and other work in the history and sociology of science demonstrates that “translation” is an interactive process involving flows of information in multiple directions. Moreover, the successes of knowledge translation in biomedicine have been less successful than what is often communicated to the public and invoked by scientific and political authorities; the translational imperative is driven by the expectation that, one day in the distant future, laboratory work will lead to clinical interventions. Hence, in 2015, John P. A. Ioannidis, one of the most influential analysts of scientific methodology in contemporary biomedicine, went as far as calling for failures and negative results to be recognized “probably as the most useful outcomes that translational research efforts can offer.” Against the background of such recent studies, the symposium proposed here aims to explore aspects of the history of knowledge translation in selected areas in the field of mental health across the world, including psychopharmacology, Alzheimer’s Disease research, the disorders of consciousness, LSD psychotherapy, mental health screening, neurocentric approaches, and the philosophical dimensions of knowledge translation.

Keywords: Translational Research – Biomedicine – Mental Health – Psychotherapy – Brain Diseases.
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