



## The Australasian Evaluation Society International Conference

After a beautiful welcome to country and a song from the New Zealand contingent, the plenary session presented by William Trochim commenced. The subject of the talk reflected the conference's focus on "Evidence and Evaluation". Prof Trochim gave an overview of the history of the evidence-based movement in evaluation, arising from the work of Sackett et al. in medicine (the talk is at <http://www.aesconference2009.com.au/documents/WilliamTrochim.pdf>). Prof Trochim's talk further encompassed recent controversies arising in the USA, between proponents of experimental methods (in particular Randomised Controlled Trials) and evaluators who doubt the feasibility or necessity of using only such methods. The issues that arose in this talk remained pertinent throughout the conference. In fact, many delegates became embroiled in rather heated discussions about the nature of evidence and what constitutes good evidence. This made for extremely interesting question times! As part of the primary health community, I think we can be proud of the extent to which we have used sophisticated epistemological/ methodological frameworks in order to reconcile different methods of data collection and analysis. Certainly, it would seem that other fields are still struggling with issues that have been, for the most part, resolved in PHC.

Other presentation highlights included Terry O'Brian (First Assistant Commissioner, The Productivity Commission) who gave a great insight into the workings of the (sometimes rather obscure) Commission, and Patricia Rogers who did an exceptional job of balancing the arguments for and against the pure use of quantitative methods. Another highlight for me was presenting on the topic of data visualization techniques- although the 40 min timeframe was a bit nerve-wracking for a first-time presenter!

Themes that emerged throughout the conference were the ways to integrate evaluation evidence in to policy. Specifically, we were reminded that the evaluation community often has different goals and priorities to that of policy makers and were given some very useful strategies and ideas as to how best to handle this schism.

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