



A POST OCCUPANCY EVALUATION GUIDE: THE KEY TO FINDING ANSWERS TO MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR QUESTIONS

Celeste Alvaro, PhD
Adjunct Professor, Department of Architectural Science, Ryerson University
Applied Research & Evaluation Consultant, Principal & Founder, CARE

Deyan Kostovski, AMA
Knowledge Translation & Communications Strategist
Strongbow Strategies



As healthcare infrastructure is modernized it is essential that we heighten our understanding of the full impact of how design affects well-being and health outcomes. We can only truly discover what works and what doesn't work, by analyzing evidence gathered from research and how it relates to the hospital environment.

It is unacceptable to expect multi-billion dollar decisions to be based on anecdotes, gut instinct and intuition.

Some forward thinking jurisdictions are responding to this challenge by mandating a required research component in their healthcare redevelopment projects. To ensure consistency in evaluation across projects, our research team is developing an innovative, practical and publically accessible planning guide for Post Occupancy Evaluations (POE). This planning guide will essentially become a tool kit assisting redevelopment teams and evaluators with some of the more rudimentary tasks as well as some of the more complex and sophisticated elements of conducting a POE.

1. Scheduling the optimum time to initiate the process

A complete POE needs to include pre construction and post construction assessments. These findings are required to better establish a cause and effect relationship between architectural design and health outcomes. Plan the POE timeline to anticipate and respond to the key milestones in the construction timeline.

2. Documenting the design intentions

What are the goals of the new design? What are they trying to achieve? It is essential that the design intentions are used as a theoretical basis against which to assess the final outcomes.

3. Outlining the human resources needs

A POE is a lengthy endeavor. To successfully evaluate a redevelopment project, you will require a very diverse group of individuals. You will need trained researchers, analysts, IT support, volunteer coordinators, clinical liaison members, communications specialists, construction liaison coordinators and much more.

4. Inviting stakeholder participation

A successful POE includes more than just researchers. Key stakeholders include: architects, construction teams, hospital leadership, community members and government bureaucrats.

5. Determining the type of evaluation most suited for the project

Understand the scope of the redevelopment project. You could be evaluating an entirely brand new hospital or it could be the construction of a new tower or wing. After understanding what is being built, you need to grasp who the new facility is designed to serve and what are the characteristic traits of the patient population.

6. Identifying quantitative research methods needed

Quantitative surveys using a variety of delivery methods, including computer assisted, online and paper-pencil formats, are crafted to assess perceptions and experience of relevant user groups, including patients, staff, visitors, and community.

7. Identifying qualitative research methods needed

Qualitative methods allow for the contextualization and documentation of the lived experience and interaction with the built environment. Methods can include unobtrusive naturalistic observation and interviews.

8. Categorizing data collection formats

Data collection will happen in two stages: pre construction and post construction. Schedule the data collection periods to account for seasonal differences. Be mindful and consistent with how the data is harvested and stored.

9. Understanding the importance of measurement and scale

Measurement scales vary as a function of the types of concepts being assessed. A small scale of 1 to 5 is best used for well-defined questions. For more ambiguous questions, a larger scale of 1 to 10 is more appropriate. It also eliminates a neutral midpoint and encourages patients to provide their true opinions.

10. Itemizing the expected outcomes

What are the anticipated outcomes based on the design intentions? How will the user experience change? A detailed and itemized list of expected outcomes will also help to reveal unexpected outcomes both positive and negative.

11. Evaluating appropriate control or test sites

Identifying and evaluating a compatible test site that acts as a control or baseline is a fundamental component of a POE. Compatibility can be assessed on a variety of characteristics, including patient population, areas of specialized treatment, size and scale, environmental surroundings and the age of the facility.

12. Developing knowledge translation exercises

A project of this size will have a variety of audiences. You need to develop a strategy that effectively publicizes the findings of the evaluation and identify which findings are of most importance to which audiences.