

An interview with Frank Becker, co-author of *A Practitioner's Guide to Evidence-Based Design*

Interviewer: We have entered the era of research-informed design. *A Practitioner's Guide to Evidence-Based Design*, a book released by The Center for Health Design, addresses the importance of understanding evidence-based design, or EBD. Although awareness of EBD is widespread, this book aims to promote a deeper comprehension of the use of evidence as a critical component of the design process. In the next few minutes, Professor Franklin Becker, a co-author of this book, addresses some of these questions. Dr. Becker is Professor and Chair of the Department of Design and Environmental Analysis in the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University.

Interviewer: ***Dr. Becker, why is it important to know the effectiveness, adoption and diffusion of evidence?***

Becker: Well it's sort of simple, which is that we are spending literally billions of dollars a year on new construction and renovations for the purpose of improving the quality of care. And we simply need to make as informed decisions as we possibly can about that, so that we can increase the likelihood that the anticipated benefits are realized. And what we really want to avoid, I think, is fads, and fashions, and even personalized experience as the primary or the only basis for why we do something. Obviously first experiences are absolutely essential but we'd like to just strengthen it by having other data that's collected that gives us maybe a broader perspective or different perspective or more reliable perspective about that and so, again the fundamental goal is to improve the quality of care. And I think, that both, not only just the cost, but the consequences of getting it right or the consequences of getting it wrong are so serious, that we just want to use as much evidence as we can to make more informed decisions.

Interviewer: ***How do you evaluate the evidence supporting a design recommendation?***

Becker: Again it's really an important question and we obviously want to have confidence in the results that we're drawing on as we make these decisions. And so for me, the gold standard really isn't, sort of the double-lined, clinical intervention, it's a model that really isn't appropriate when we're talking about design. I know of no situation where everything is the same and only one design factor or feature has been changed and nothing's changed about technology, nothing's changed about the management practices, nothing's changed about the monologue characters, it doesn't happen that way.

So for me, a key criterion is not that there's a single perfect study, no matter how large. But rather I would put more confidence in the fact that several studies have been looking at a common question. Each which does it slightly different, but they come out with findings that are very similar. That tells me that the results are really robust. They're not just dependent upon types of a particular study that he found that or somebody else finding that, but different people looking at the same question with comparable methods coming out with common results, give me confidence that this again is something that is not idiosyncratic, it's not just a one-off. So for me, that's a big criterion for evaluation. Within that, sort of looking at multiple studies, then I look and see, "well, have researchers used accepted and reliable means of collecting the data, analyzing the data, and interpreting the data?"

Just as an example, if someone is doing interviews, I'd like to know that these weren't interviewees that were selected by a hospital after a new project was implemented to talk with me. I'd rather randomly select the interviewees so that I have a sense that they have not been collected to give me a particular point of view. Just one example of using a



widely accepted model of how you conduct interviews in terms of study so that, to get more valid, reliable results. I would look at those kinds of decisions throughout the research projects. So I have more confidence that it isn't something that has been skewed because how we collected the data, or who collected the data, or who was involved in providing the data.

Interviewer: Thank you for listening. The *Practitioner's Guide to Evidence-Based Design* is available for purchase at The Center for Health Design's store for \$36. Visit www.healthdesign.org for more information.