OPINION LEADERS

Opinion leaders are generally defined as those individuals whose beliefs, practices and behaviours are noticed and imitated by others. If these opinion leaders are observed by others to adopt an innovation or concept that seems valued, it can spread through the population – this is particularly the case in the context of through social media.

Studies have demonstrated that opinion leaders are effective in changing behaviours of healthcare practitioners especially in combination with educational outreach or performance feedback. The key characteristic of an opinion leader is that he or she is trusted to evaluate new information in the context of group norms. Opinion leadership is multifaceted with roles varying with the circumstances, but research has shown that few successful projects to implement innovations in organisations have managed without the input of identifiable opinion leaders.

Thus, having local opinion leaders discuss the evidence based practices with members of their peer group is necessary to translate research effectively into practice. Opinion leaders often emerge organically across organisations and but it is clear that strategies for embedding evidence based practice should take account of the importance of the identification, engagement and positioning of opinion leaders in networks, projects, communities and beyond. If the evidence based practice that is being implemented is interdisciplinary in nature, discipline-specific opinion leaders should be used to promote the change in practice.

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK2659/
http://www.tlainc.com/articl42.htm