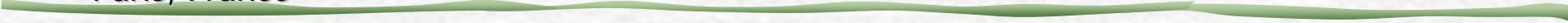# From Ideas to Policy: The Role of Think Tanks in a Larger Context

AVRIST

David Stonner

December 19-20, 2007

Paris, France

Ideas to Policy

* Historical examples of how an idea can move into the policy realm.

* Agents that speed up and slow down the process.

* Personal reflections on the role of Think Tanks in the public policy arena.

Getting Information to Policy Makers

1536 Jacques Cartier

1631 John Lancaster

1740 George Anson's Circumnavigation (Lind 1747)

Post 1800 – Citrus as a preventive measure

Scott's Antarctic exploration 1900s

Why did it take so long?

Ulterior motives; beneficiaries weren't convinced; policy makers weren't engaged; undefined context; etc.

When the Evidence is Clear

Puerperal Fever

Mid 17th Century Laying In Hospitals (1646)

Mortality Rates of 20% to 100%

Early explanations

1795-Gordon--physician hygiene

1842- Watson

1850 - Ignaz Semmelweiss

(1860) Cut mortality to less than 1%

Eventual Adoption

Policy Making When the Evidence is Lacking

Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa)

Rep. Berkeley Bedell (D-Iowa)

Personal Experience with non-standard medical treatments for allergies (bee pollen)/Lyme Disease and prostate cancer

1990 OTA Study on Unconventional Cancer Treatments

1991 Initiated Office of Alternative Medicine--$2 million

1998 Combined into National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Funding to Date: ~ $900 million

Why Did OMA Happen?

Powerful Advocate (Personal Experience)
Large External Constituency

Between 30 and 50 percent of the public

Among people with some college education (50.6 percent) vs. with no college education (36.4 percent);

Aged 35-49;

Annual incomes above $50,000.

Fragmented Opposition

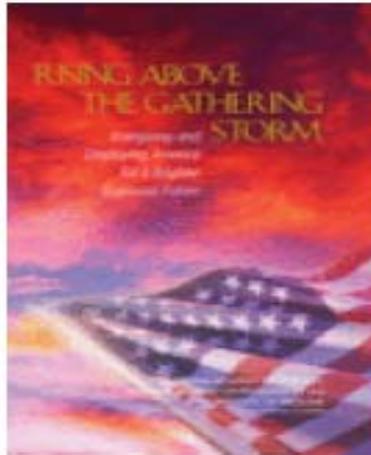A business estimated at $15 to $45 billion

Notable Recent Successful Think Tank Report

National Academy of Science (2005)

Requested by Congress

20 CEOs, University Presidents, Scientists

Effective Lobbying by Credible Champions

	Data	Public	Effective Advocate	Follow through
Scurvy	✔	X	X	✔
Puerperal Fever	✔	X	X	✔
CCAM	X	✔	✔ ✔	?
Science Funding	X	X	✔ ✔	?

Personal Reflections on Think Tanks

Congressional Perspective

Cast Debates in Political Terms

- National Technology Policy
- National Health Care Policy
- Foreign Policy
- Defense Policy

Buttress Existing Positions, Provide Rationales/Data

Very seldom the source of a new idea

Conclusions

✳ Getting from data to policy is difficult.

✳ It isn't enough to have good data.

✳ It's better to have a good advocate than good data.

✳ If you want your think tank to be effective, engage effective advocates.