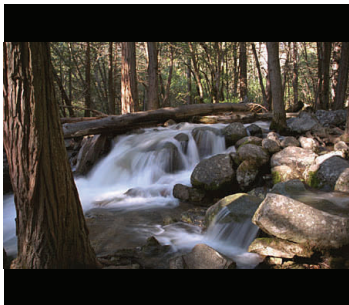


PRIMARY CARE CLINICIANS “MUST DO RESEARCH”



The RIOS Net News

The New Mexico Practice-Based Resource and Research Network

Issuing a challenge to members assembled for the first meeting of RIOS Net, Dr. Larry Green, founder of the ASPN network, member of the Institute of Medicine and Director of the Graham Center for Policy Studies went on to stress the importance of primary care network research. Dr. Green, in his keynote presentation, emphasized the huge portion of health care delivered by primary care clinicians, together with the fact that primary care clinicians can do research on critical areas of health that others cannot do.

With this challenge in mind, attendees at the meeting took key steps to move the network forward in its mission to improve the health and primary care of the state's low-income residents. Over a day and a half, RIOS Net members from around the state reviewed, discussed and made decisions on a

variety of topics. In some of the highlights from the crowded agenda, members:

- Reviewed work done by other primary care research networks
- Heard a report on the current membership and organizational structure of RIOS Net
- Reviewed pending RIOS Net projects (detailed elsewhere in this newsletter)
- Suggested and discussed topics for future projects within RIOS Net
- Discussed methods of including community members in the RIOS Net processes
- Heard reports on the status of the electronic network supporting RIOS Net and on RIOS Net member benefits
- Elected a permanent RIOS Net Board of Directors to replace the temporary Board

- Attended several clinical and research technique presentations

By the end of the meeting, a clear set of actions had been outlined to move the network forward. Those who attended this first meeting of the RIOS Network left with enthusiasm to get going with the work of the network.

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GREEN GREETES GRANDE GATHERING OF RIOS-Net GENERALISTS

Chuck North, MD and Rob Williams, MD

RIOS Net was honored to host Dr. Larry Green as keynote speaker for its first membership meeting. Dr. Green, Director of the American Academy of Family Physicians' Robert Graham Center for Policy Studies in Family Practice and Primary Care, member of the prestigious Institute of Medicine, and former chair of the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Colorado delivered a compelling address on the importance of primary care clinicians' direct involvement in research. As a founder of the Ambulatory Sentinel Practice Network, the first national practice based research network, Larry is internationally known and well placed to speak on research in primary care.

In his address, Dr. Green made four key points:

1. Primary care clinicians provide the great majority of health care throughout the U.S., particularly including medically underserved areas. This also includes persons with the highest priority health conditions.
2. There is important research in primary care that needs to be done (e.g., illnesses that are seen entirely within primary care; the prevention of disease before it begins, etc.)
3. Primary care clinicians can do research and do it well (e.g., testing

strategies that work in the real world of practice, study how people do or don't get sick or do or don't get well, etc.)

4. Others can't do all the research primary care clinicians need (e.g., you can't study what you don't know or can't find, when primary care is part of the solution to the problem, it can't be understood without primary care involvement, etc.)

He went on to emphasize the case for primary care clinicians' involvement in research by citing well-known data about the proportions of various countries' GDP spent on healthcare and their overall ranking by health performance measures.

Together these rankings show poor performance by the U.S. healthcare systems. Dr. Green argued that it is time for primary care clinicians to take a role in leading the way to better performance through real world research.

Dr. Green's presentation came against the background of the publication in the previous day's New England Journal of Medicine of his article on The Ecology of Medical Care Revisited (NEJM, 344:26 June 28, 2001). Larry along with David Lanier, MD of AHRQ and others calculated estimates of the monthly prevalence of illness

in communities and the roles of physicians, hospitals and university medical centers in the provision of medical care.

Green, et al, found that in one month, of 1000 people in a community, approximately 800 have symptoms, 113 visit a primary care doctor, 8 are hospitalized, and <1 receives care in an academic medical center. Since 113 per 1000 visit a primary care physician's office while less than one receives care in an academic medical center hospital (per month) it is clear that our research priorities need to change if we are to make progress in health care. This ecology model has important implications for the hot topic of medical errors also since most efforts have focused on the safety of hospitalized patients but over 14 times as many people see a primary care doctor.

Dr. Green concludes in his paper, "It (the model) highlights the need for comprehensive medical information systems that span all sites of care. The model also shows the need for alternative types of research laboratories, such as practice-based research networks, which allow the study of patients where they receive their care.

Workshop to Address the "ABC's" of Research

On Friday, August 31, RIOS Net and the UNM Primary Care Research Collaborative will host the first in a series of workshops designed to enhance clinicians' skills in conducting research. The daylong workshop will be free to RIOS Net members and will address two topics. In the morning session, participants will learn how to turn a clinical question into a feasible research project. In the afternoon session, discussion will center around how to obtain grant funding for studies.

The workshop will be co-led by Deborah Helitzer, ScD, faculty member in the UNM Division of Community Medicine. As the Director of the Office of Evaluation, Dr. Helitzer has extensive research experience evaluating public health projects in communities throughout New Mexico.

Guest speaker Kurt Stange, MD, PhD is a faculty member in the Department of Family Medicine at Case Western Reserve University, member of the Institute of Medicine and president-elect of the North American Primary Care Research Group. He directs a practice-based research network in Ohio and is best known for his landmark work on the content of primary care office visits.

The workshop will be held from 8:00-4:00 in room 340 in the Family Practice Building on the UNM North Campus, at 2400 Tucker Ave NE in Albuquerque. Dr. Stange will deliver a lunchtime presentation summarizing recent research on the primary care doctor-patient interaction, and enhancing preventive services in primary care.

Future RIOS Net Projects Discussed

A key part of the RIOS Net meeting was a discussion about topics for possible future projects within the network. A wide range of interesting and worthy topics was suggested both before and during the meeting. A few samples of the many topic areas that were discussed are:

- Obesity in children and adolescents
- Violence prevention in the primary care setting
- Use of traditional medicine in the communities where members practice
- Depression – care seeking and management
- Medical system problems that result in adverse outcomes
- The role of social networks in improving health outcomes

- Effective tobacco cessation strategies in low-income, culturally diverse communities
- Effective strategies for promotion of healthy behaviors

Altogether some 54 different topic areas have been suggested. The network staff will now process the list and from it produce a limited set of brief concept papers for review by network members. These papers will:

1. propose specific clinical research questions related to a topic;
2. estimate the likelihood of the project's resulting in outcomes of value to the members, their patients and the larger scientific community;
3. estimate the feasibility of the project within the network

4. estimate the time commitment of each member's participation in the project
5. estimate the likelihood of successfully obtaining funding to support the project;
6. estimate the importance of the project to members and their patients and communities.

The concept papers will be distributed on the RIOS Net list serve for comment prior to the next meeting of the Board of Directors. The Board will then decide on which topics to pursue, and the staff will begin developing more detailed proposals. We welcome any further suggestions about topics at any time, and would be happy to discuss any of this with you.

Research Resources for RIOS Net Members

Alison Baker

Do you have an idea for a small research study you'd like to conduct in your practice? Have you thought about doing your own research project, but felt that you needed some additional knowledge and skills first? We can help! The purpose of RIOS Net is not only to bring clinicians together to study and improve primary care, but also to serve as a resource to clinicians interested in research.

The **pilot project funding program** provides seed money to practicing primary care practitioners who have a clinical question they would like to investigate in their clinics, but who don't have the resources. Small grants of up to \$1000 are available through the UNM Primary Care Research Collaborative. Prior research experience is not necessary! Faculty and staff from the Division of Family Medicine will offer methodological and statistical support, if desired, as applicants develop and conduct their projects.

The **research workshop series** features local experts and guest speakers from around the country. To be held twice yearly, the workshops will be daylong opportunities for clinicians and faculty to gain critical research skills in a friendly atmosphere. The first workshop is scheduled for **August 31, 2001** and will focus on the ABC's of developing a research project (see page 2 for details). If you have a topic you would like to see addressed as a workshop in the series, let us know! We value your input to ensure that the series meets your needs as a clinician researcher.

Practitioners interested in more intensive learning might consider taking **web-based courses** in public health topics such as epidemiology and biostatistics. The courses, led by faculty in the Department of Family & Community Medicine, are open to all RIOS Net members. The classes are self-directed, with specific readings, lecture notes, and homework assignments each month, and periodic

tests for evaluation. Students regularly meet in person with the faculty to discuss the content covered during that period.

We are working to provide still more resources to RIOS Net clinicians, and will update you on new opportunities in future newsletters. For information about any of the programs mentioned above, please contact Alison Baker at abaker@salud.unm.edu or 272-3489.



RIOS Net Growth Continues

Bill Gloyd, MD

A dedicated and diverse membership is key to a blossoming primary care research Network. With more members come more ideas and wider public awareness of the program.

In an effort to make RIOS Net truly representative of primary care in New Mexico, over the past year the network co-directors have traveled the state to meet with clinicians in community health centers and Indian Health sites. Dr. Mark Unverzagt, one of the founding fathers of the network, has visited CHC practitioners throughout New Mexico to introduce the idea of clinicians joining together to gather clinical data in an effort to determine what does and does not work in primary care in New Mexico.

Chuck North, Bill Gloyd, Mark Unverzagt, Alison Baker and Rob Williams have visited Indian Health sites in

Crownpoint and Shiprock to talk with members of medical staffs about the new research and resource network. Most clinicians were interested in joining the network in order to help their patients get the best possible health care. They also appreciated the opportunity to gain better access to the UNM Health Science Center Library and Informatics Center resources.

Network representatives have also set up at various medical meetings to enhance RIOS Net's recognition around the state. This spring, network representatives attended the NM Primary Care Association meeting in Taos, the IHS Research meeting in Albuquerque, and the IHS Pediatric meeting in Phoenix.

Dr. Robert Rhyne and Alison Baker have attended faculty meetings in the family medicine, general pediatrics, and general internal medicine divisions at UNM to

describe RIOS Net and its mission.

Over the last 6 months there has been a 200% increase in membership. **As this newsletter goes to print, we have 84 active clinician members in RIOS Net!** Of these, 21 (25%) are in academic settings, 33 (39%) in community health centers, 27 (32%) in the Indian Health settings, and 3 (4%) in private practice. This group represents more than 40 practice sites.

Now that we've had our first general membership meeting, folks are excited and energized about the mission and potential of the network. A large membership core has been established and we hope that the new recruits will encourage their colleagues to join the fun

With the enthusiasm and support of all of its members, RIOS Net membership will continue to grow.

RIOS Net is committed to meeting directly with clinicians and administrators to talk about the new network and about their research interests. Current members or interested clinicians who would like us to visit their practice and talk about the network at a medical staff or administrative meeting should contact Alison Baker at 272-3489 or abaker@salud.unm.edu.

Clinicians Elect Representatives to Board of Directors

The RIOS Net Board of Directors, a group designed to be representative of the clinician members in the network, holds responsibility for establishing overall direction of the network and setting policy. A temporary board was created in January of this year to oversee development of the fledgling network until the members could meet to elect a permanent board. At the June 2001 membership meeting, in accordance with the network by-laws, participants elected a panel of clinician representatives for the Board of Directors. Other members of the board include the network director and co-directors and the technical support representative. Yet to be elected are the representative from the associate membership and three members from the Community Advisory Board.

Clinician Members of the Board of Directors include:

Community Health Center Representatives:

Nancy Guinn, MD (El Pueblo Health Service, Bernalillo)
Brian Hertz, MD (La Familia Medical Center, Santa Fe)
Janeen Maas, MD (Women's Health Services, Santa Fe)
Enrique Martinez, MD (Ben Archer, Hatch)
Linda Stogner, MD (Hope Medical Services, Estancia)

Indian Health Representatives:

Gayle Dine Chacon, MD (Sandia Clinic)
Bill Gloyd, MD (Albuquerque Indian Hospital)
Kiko Torres, MD (Acoma-Canoncito-Laguna Clinic)

Academic Practice Representatives:

Andrew Hsi, MD (Pediatrics)
Alberta Kong, MD (Pediatrics)
Bob Leverence, MD (Internal Medicine)

NAMCS Project to Paint a Picture of RIOS Net

Mark Unverzagt, MD

When I first saw the NAMCS (National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey) form, I thought to myself "This is horrible. I can't believe we would ask our members to fill this out as our inaugural study!" At first, I even voted against doing it in the Board meeting.

However, recently I looked at it again. As I did I began to understand the importance of doing this exercise collectively as our first activity. Here's why I have changed my mind (the water drop torture and splinters under my fingernails that Rob prescribed for me really had nothing to do with it—I promise!).

The value to me--as an individual practitioner--in doing practice-based research is to participate in a process whereby I can reflect on my practice patterns, my patients and my practice environment in an objective and systematic way. With my participation in

a PBRN, I have less reliance on anecdote and more reliance on fact when making decisions about my clinical care and my practice. This is vitally important when I try to ensure quality care. NAMCS, as one tool we have decided to adopt as part of this process, will allow me to take a snapshot of what I actually do in my practice. This information will be fed back to me in a way that not only allows me to view that snapshot, but will also encourage me to use that information to ask subsequent questions about those patients. How many diabetics did I see? What is their ethnicity? Are some groups doing better than others? If so, why? I didn't realize that I see so few geriatric patients. What can I do to change that? Do all my pediatric patients really have otitis media? Am I immunizing the sick kids if they need to be caught up?

In addition, there is a collective value

in doing this. The trips I have taken around the state to recruit members for RIOS Net have demonstrated to me that there is no shortage of ideas for research. What we do lack, however, is a refined process for selecting and then pursuing ideas that we will then turn in to a research project. NAMCS does that for us. I believe it will help us understand not only who we are and what we do as individuals but also who we are and what we do as a collective group of safety net practitioners. NAMCS is a fantastic opportunity for us to collaborate as a first step in defining our importance to this state. It will help us begin the process of beginning, and I think it is likely to take us down a very fruitful and productive path of unique collaboration.

I look forward very much to participating with each of you in this first RIOS Net project.

RIOS Net Project Focuses on Community Members

The central purpose of RIOS Net is to collaboratively study ways to improve the primary care of the low-income, medically underserved and culturally diverse communities served by the network members. While members of the network, through its Board of Directors, make the final decisions about what topics to study, it is important that the views of community members be a part of the decision process. Plans are underway to form a community advisory board for the network. However, it is also essential to consider how to maximize community participation in decisions about network projects.

The nature of the communities served by RIOS Net members, many of which are rural and maintain traditional cultures, create important circumstances to consider in any network project. While health data confidentiality is important everywhere, there are unique aspects of rural or traditional lifestyles that influence confidentiality, network operations, and

the sharing of data within the network. As the network begins operations, it will be critical to assure that these features are taken into consideration.

To get further guidance both about community participation in network operations and about unique aspects of health data confidentiality in network communities, the RIOS Net Board of Directors has decided to seek fund-

ing for a project to collect information on these topics. Specifically, a project has been proposed to organize focus groups in RIOS Net communities around the state. In many cases these groups will be composed of members of local health boards. The groups will be asked to give feedback on how RIOS Net can work at the local level to assure that community members are included in decisions about network operations. They will also be asked to advise on any aspects of culture or local circumstances

that could impact on or be affected by the network's projects. Groups will be formed to represent Navajo, Pueblo, native Hispanic and immigrant Hispanic communities as well as health care staff from RIOS Net practices.

The federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, which has provided some initial funding for RIOS Net, has been approached to support this project. A decision by the agency is expected by the end of the summer, and if funded, the project would begin in the fall. Although members of the network would not be directly involved in this project, if funding support is obtained, the network staff may ask some members for advice on local contacts during the process of organizing the focus groups.

If you have questions about this project or are interested either in more informa-



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Update On RIOS Net Electronic Linkages

Alison Baker

Since March, when we first described plans for the RIOS Net electronic communication system, we have reached several important information technology milestones. First, we have fielded the Electronic Capability Survey to determine members' access to electronic resources in their practices. Based on the data gleaned from this survey, we identified a half-dozen members who do not have computers they can use in their practices. Thanks to generous donations from Phillip Eaton, MD (Vice President, UNM Health Sciences Center), Paul Roth, MD (Dean, School of Medicine), and the Departments of Family and Community Medicine, Internal Medicine, and Pediatrics, we are now in the process of buying computers for these clinicians!

Second, the RIOS Net website is now up and running at http://hsc.unm.edu/rios. The website, open to the public, includes information about the network and up-

coming events, as well as links to HSC resources and health organizations throughout the state. Work has begun on development of a password-protected "members only" portion of the website that will allow members to view project information, to obtain network-wide study-specific data, and to communicate with one another. As part of this website, individual members will have private access to their own aggregated project-specific data, which they can compare to the network-wide reports.

Third, we are working closely with Ellen Cosgrove, MD, Dean of Continuing Medical Education, to generate innovative ideas for incorporating CME opportunities into network activities. Possibilities include obtaining credit for participation in topic-specific threaded discussion forums on the web and for participation in RIOS Net research projects. More information about these

opportunities will be posted in the coming months on the web and the network listserv.

- Coming Soon to a Mailbox Near You...
In August, we will send each member the RIOS Net practice and clinician membership surveys. On these brief surveys, we will ask for basic demographic information about you, your practice site(s) and your patient panel. After you complete a few questions about yourself and your training, you might find that your office manager or another administrator can best complete the items on practice characteristics. This information is crucial to determining the composition and characteristics of RIOS Net. We thank you in advance for your cooperation in completing these surveys!