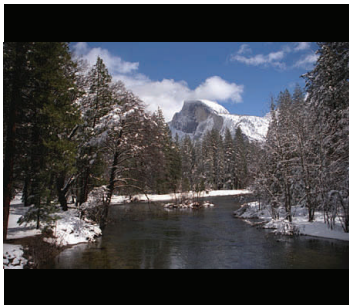


WELCOME



The RIOS Net News

The New Mexico Practice-Based Resource and Research Network

We welcome you as part of an exciting new venture! Practice-based research networks (PBRN) first appeared in the U.S. about 20 years ago, when some primary care doctors felt that what they were seeing in practice wasn't like how those same problems were described in research coming out of tertiary care centers. These docs came together to form networks of clinicians who studied and reported on clinical problems as they were seeing them in practice. The result was groundbreaking research that has redefined the management of problems seen in primary care.

In the last 20 years, a number of these "PBRNs", have developed across the country, with the number of primary care practitioners in any given network varying from a few dozen to several hundred. One of the strengths of these PBRNs has been that the patients seen by the member practitioners represent a true cross-section of primary care patients, unlike those seen in referral centers.

The Research Involving Outpatient Settings Network (RIOS Net) is a new idea. It is an innovative PBRN whose members are practitioners in our state's Community Health Centers, Indian Health Service and tribal health care centers. It is organized specifically for practitioners in these health care facilities to study and improve primary care of the ethnically diverse and often low-income patients they care for. While other PBRNs have the strength of representing the general population, they do not well represent health and health care as it is seen on the front lines in communities where people often have to balance their health care against other needs. In the days when I worked in a rural IHS site and would periodically travel to a large city for a primary care CME course, I would often think of myself as Dorothy visiting in the Land of Oz. They were talking about tight glucose control with multidose insulin management and I was dealing with

diabetics who had to live on commodity foods and haul their drinking water 30 miles in barrels. The goal of RIOS Net is to better understand the reality of health, wellness, and illness in these settings, as well as how to better provide primary care for the populations we serve.

We welcome you to the Research Involving Outpatient Settings Network. You **are** RIOS Net. By joining with others across the state who work in similar situations, you will be the RIOS Net. You and the other members of the network will decide what clinical concerns are worthy of study in the network. You will report on how you see and handle those problems. Your collective experience will not only inform yourselves about how to improve the care of the people you serve, but it will also inform others across the country who work in similar circumstances. RIOS Net is equally as groundbreaking as the first PBRNs.

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ON THE HORIZON

The Research Involving Outpatient Settings Network (RIOS Net) is in its infancy. Over the next few months as we advance to toddlerhood and take our first steps, it may seem at times that nothing is happening. However, work will be going on behind the scenes to prepare us for the first steps. A board of directors has been formed and begun meeting to plan for the early development of the network. Word is being spread among colleagues in CHCs, IHS and tribal sites across the state who may be interested in joining the network. Plans are being developed for



electronic linkage of all the network members and for linking each member to resources at the UNM Health Sciences Center. In the next several months, a process of identifying common interests and clinical questions among the members will begin. This process will culminate in a "convocation" of all the network members in mid-summer at which key decisions will be made by the members as to network direction, including which clinical questions to pursue. We will continue to keep you informed of de-

velopments over the next several months, and you may hear from us from time to time. In planning to meet the needs of members, to set up a system of information exchange, and to prepare for later developments, we will need to collect some information from each member. We ask that you bear with us as we get ready for those first steps.



What Does it Mean to be a Member of RIOSNet?

What does it mean? OK, so you said you thought you might like to be a member of this network. What does that really mean? As a member of the network, you will be able to join colleagues around the state in collaborative work to study how primary care is best provided for the low-income, ethnically diverse communities served by community health centers, Indian Health Service and tribal health care facilities. You will participate with other network members in choosing which topics to study. You may choose to lead a study, you may choose to help plan a study, you may prefer to simply join others in reporting how you manage a particular clinical problem, or you may choose not to participate at all in a particular study. The choice is yours.

The time commitment is also yours to decide. We anticipate that, in general, if you agree to participate in a study being conducted by the network members, you will collect a minimum amount of information about a few cases per week – a time commitment of 5-10 minutes per week for the duration of a study. You will also be asked to supply information about yourself and your practice population on an annual

basis – a time commitment of perhaps 30 minutes a year. Finally, you will be encouraged to join an annual convocation of network members at which members will discuss and decide upon topics to study, will help design study protocols so that they can be implemented with maximum efficiency in the practice setting, will learn about the work they have been doing, and will hear presentations on related topics.

Beyond the opportunity to share your clinical ideas and collaborate on studying ways to improve primary care for your patients, efforts are underway to give members free access to internet-based public health courses offered by UNM, free access to UNM library resources, and free access to internet based CME offerings of UNM. One of the goals of the network is to provide confidential practice-specific data summaries that can be used in quality improvement activities. Electronic linkages to be developed as part of the network will offer the opportunity to exchange clinical ideas and questions at any time with colleagues working in similar locations across the state.

Introducing the RIOS Net Listserve

To enhance communication between network members and between the members and the central office, we have developed a RIOS Net listserv. A listserv is an e-mail discussion group where members throughout the state can post questions and responses about issues that arise in the course of daily practice. You, as members, can also identify research topics that you would like to pursue as a network to improve your own primary care practice.

To join the listserv, send an e-mail message to:

riosnet-request@biblio.unm.edu

In the Subject field, type:
Subscribe

No text is necessary in the body of the message. You will receive a return e-mail message welcoming you to the RIOS Net listserv, which will indicate that you have successfully subscribed.

Information Technology Update

A strong electronic communication system is an integral part of a practice-based resource and research network. As the Research Involving Office Settings Network gets underway, a team of clinical and technological experts is meeting regularly to address the communication needs of the network. The electronic system will be designed to meet four key purposes:

1. Allow network practitioners to communicate with one another and with network leadership and staff;
2. Provide network members access to the various resources available at the UNM Health Sciences Center, including:
 - a. E-mail system
 - b. Health Sciences Center Library
 - c. Continuing Medical Education
 - d. Research methodology expertise
 - e. Electronic medical expert consultation
 - f. Master's of Public Health program web-based courses, and
 - g. Electronic data exchange capability;
3. Enable network practitioners to identify and discuss primary care research questions together; and
4. Provide network members with practice-specific and network-wide data shortly after each study's completion, facilitating the translation of research findings into pri-

mary care practice.

In order to reap the full benefits of network participation, practices need to be able to access the communication system. In the coming months, RIOS Net will contact your practice to discuss your current electronic capabilities, as well as to identify the types of hardware you might need (eg, computer, modem). RIOS Net has a limited amount of money donated by the School of Medicine to buy critical hardware for practices with fewer resources. We look forward to working with you as we all make the plans for high-technology communications within the network a reality!

Board of Directors Update

The Board of Directors for the network met in Albuquerque on February 2. The Board, which has members representing community health center, Indian Health Service/tribal and academic practitioners as well as research technical and network management representatives, discussed several issues related to the network development. How to best get word about the network to potential members was discussed. An update was presented on activities to link the network members electronically and to arrange for access of members to UNM library resources. Preliminary plans for a convocation of network members to be held in the summer were discussed, as was the composition of a community advisory board for the network. The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for March 9. The agenda for that meeting will include discussion of a draft set of bylaws for the network, along with further discussion of all the above topics.

Meet the Network Leadership and Staff

Robert Williams, MD

Director

Prior to his arrival at the UNM School of Medicine in 1999, Rob practiced for seven years at the Crownpoint IHS site and for nine years in a community health center.

Charles North, MD

Co-Director

Currently the Medical Director of the Indian Health Service Albuquerque Service Unit and the Chief Clinical Consultant in Family Practice for IHS nationally, Chuck has been an IHS practitioner for over 23 years.

Robert Rhyne, MD

Co-Director

The Director of Research in Family Medicine at UNM and a faculty member for 17 years, Bob has extensive experience in community-oriented primary care practice, education and research.

Mark Unverzagt, MD

Co-Director

Mark served four years as the Medical Director of the Catron County Medical Center and as a community health center practitioner in Reserve before joining the UNM faculty in 1997.

Alison Baker, MS

Sr Program Manager

Before becoming a member of the network staff in January, Alison was a research associate with PROS, the practice-based research network of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Laura Day

Administrative Assistant III

A longtime UNM employee, Laura joined the Division of Family Medicine in 2000 after serving as a coordinator of special events in Undergraduate Medical Education.



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The Practitioner's Perspective...

“Does every woman who has a miscarriage require a dilation and curettage (D&C)? Does every patient with new-onset headache require a computed tomographic (CT) scan?” (Nutting et al, 1999)*. Do other doctors in public settings make the same kind of mistakes I do? How do they manage them? Am I missing something from the lack of an extensive library in my public clinic? Hardly a day goes by when I don't wonder if I could improve some aspect of my personal practice. Questions from patients, family members, students and residents send me searching the medical literature. After over 16 years in practice next to the medical school, I've learned to appreciate the information resources even as I miss the pace and exhilaration of being a family doctor on Hopi. Every board recertification, laboratory inspection and JCAHO activity prompts me to find ways to improve our system and to find ways to better serve our patients and communities.

Joining RIOS Net, the New Mexico practice-based resource and research network, can help you and your colleagues feel connected to a larger web of primary care physicians serving those most in need. Not only can the University help obtain

access to the best medical information, but also we can share our efforts to answer meaningful questions that arise in daily practice. What we learn can directly benefit our patients and communities by putting research findings into practice. In our practice at the Albuquerque Indian Hospital we found that participation in the now defunct Ambulatory Sentinel Practice Network (ASPN) gave us insight and confidence in medical decisions. We also enjoyed the connection with other practicing physicians who wanted to be clinicians but benefit from academic support. We invite you to join us in continuing the tradition of inquiry and improvement that comes from membership in practice based research networks. In partnership with the University of New Mexico we can improve our ability to meet our goals of elevating the health status of Indian people and Indian communities.

- Chuck North, MD

* Nutting PA, Beasley JW, Werner JJ. Practice-based research networks answer primary care questions. *JAMA*. 1999;281:686-8.