

Primary Care: Where Research and Practice Meet

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality • 2101 East Jefferson Street • Rockville, MD 20852



AHRQ is the lead Federal agency charged with supporting research designed to improve the quality of health care, reduce its cost, address patient safety and medical errors, and broaden access to essential services. AHRQ sponsors and conducts research that provides evidence-based information on health care outcomes; quality; and cost, use, and access. The information helps health care decisionmakers—patients and clinicians, health system leaders, and policymakers—make more informed decisions and improve the quality of health care services.



U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Public Health Service

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's (AHRQ's) Center for Primary Care Research (CPCR) is dedicated to conducting and supporting research on the provision of primary care, including the systems and policies that affect practices. The Center defines primary care as the provision of integrated, high-quality, accessible health care services by clinicians who are accountable for addressing a full range of personal health and health care needs; developing a sustained partnership with patients; practicing in the context of family and community; and working to minimize disparities across population subgroups.¹

Designated by Congress to "serve as the principal source of funding for primary care practice research in the Department of Health and Human Services,"² CPCR provides expertise and national leadership on issues related to primary care.

Vision

CPCR's vision is to support and conduct research that will improve the access, effectiveness, and quality of primary health care services throughout the United States. CPCR seeks to be known

nationally as a major source of information on primary care practice and to be recognized internationally for the excellence of the research it supports and conducts. This vision includes a commitment to building capacity within the primary care research community, and to forming productive, sustained partnerships with organizations that share the goal of improved primary care services. These include both private and professional groups and other government agencies.

Activities

The Center supports extramural and intramural research that addresses a wide range of issues related to primary care practice and policy, including: the quality, costs, and outcomes of primary care; patient-provider communication; generalist-specialist issues; workforce issues; and access to care, including disparities in care. CPCR's activities are enriched and advanced through on-going collaborations with several national professional organizations of primary care clinicians, as well as with other Federal, private-sector, and non-profit organizations that share the Center's interests. CPCR also serves as AHRQ's coordinating center for research related to medical informatics, the health and health care of low-income populations and those residing in rural and urban/inner city areas, end-of life care, and clinical preparedness for bioterrorism.

¹Adapted from the definition developed by a committee of the Institute of Medicine and published in *Primary Care: America's Health in a New Era*, National Academy Press, 1996.

²Healthcare Research and Quality Act of 1999, amendment to Title IX of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C.299 et seq.)



Extramural Research Initiatives in CPRC

CPCR houses a considerable body of investigator-initiated research on primary care-related topics. CPRC project officers are frequently consulted by primary investigators throughout the grant process, beginning with reviews of initial concept papers prior to grant submission. In addition, the Center also develops and coordinates sponsored research programs. Recent examples include:

- **Primary Care Practice-Based Research Networks (PBRNs).** Specific groups of ambulatory practices devoted principally to the care of patients collaborate with academic researchers in order to investigate questions related to community-based primary care practice. AHRQ funding currently supports infrastructure development and research capacity building in 18 networks involving over 5,000 primary care clinicians who care for more than 6 million patients. These networks collect and analyze data related to the full range of primary care, including the health care of minority and underserved populations, and the translation of new research findings into health care practice.
- **Clinical Informatics to Promote Patient Safety (CLIPS).** By funding the development and testing of information technology tools that can be used to reduce the risk of medical errors and improve quality of care, this program ensures a major focus on the role of informatics in improving clinical decisionmaking, reducing errors, and advancing patient safety. Projects also address barriers to acceptance and adoption of health information technology and issues of patient confidentiality.
- **Effect of Health Care Working Conditions on Quality of Care.** Critical to improving health care delivery is identifying, characterizing, and directly measuring the effect of the health care work environment on the safety and quality of care provided by health care workers. Grants funded

under this program test innovative approaches to working conditions that have been effective in improving the quality of a product or service in industries other than health care.

- **Clinical Preparedness for Bioterrorism.** This initiative focuses on helping clinicians respond to bioterrorism through effective training methods, decision support technologies, and effective on-line products, and by providing state and local policymakers with tools for assessing and strengthening health care system capacity in their jurisdictions. Projects funded under this initiative also help the health care system respond to bioterrorism incidents by providing measures to assess hospital preparedness and response, building decision support models for information systems, and developing effective detection and surveillance systems.

Intramural Research Activities

Researchers within CPRC explore a wide range of issues related to the delivery of primary care, its costs, quality, and outcomes using secondary data sources. One major area of research focuses on disparities in access to, use of, and quality of care for vulnerable populations, including disparities by race/ethnicity, geographic location, type of health insurance, and accessibility of willing providers. Other areas of research include provider practice styles and the impact of primary care on the outcomes of patients with common diseases and conditions.

For More Information

Additional information concerning CPRC research and other activities can be found at the Agency's Web site, (www.ahrq.gov), or by contacting:

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