



PBRNews

A Quarterly Newsletter from the AHRQ PBRN Resource Center

IN THIS ISSUE:

- 1** Greetings From the Resource Center
- 1** 2010 Annual Research Conference
- 2** Registry Status
- 3** PBRN Research Portal
- 4** Featured Network: WREN
- 5** Bibliography

Greetings From the Resource Center

The PBRN Resource Center is pleased to announce the unveiling of PBRNews. This quarterly e-newsletter will be provided to members of the PBRN listserv and posted on AHRQ's PBRN website. PBRNews is filled with information that will keep your PBRN engaged in the ongoing development of AHRQ's PBRN initiative. This newsletter will highlight PBRN news, keep your

network informed of current and upcoming events, and provide valuable information about the tools and resources available within AHRQ's PBRN community.

Interested in submitting an article for PBRNews? Please send all questions, comments, or suggestions to pbrnrc@umn.edu.

2010 Annual Research Conference

The sixth annual National PBRN Research Conference is scheduled for June 16-18, 2010 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Bethesda, Maryland. This meeting is one of the ways that the agency supports the growth and development of primary care PBRNs across the country. It offers this expanding community an opportunity to share its accomplishments, lessons learned, and current challenges to benefit both experienced PBRNers and those starting out. The goals of the Primary Care PBRN Research Conference are to **disseminate findings and lessons learned** through PBRN research; **enhance the growth and development** of primary care PBRNs through advancing the field of practice-based research methodology; and **promote communications and connections** within the PBRN research community. Attendees include PBRN directors,

clinicians, researchers, coordinators, and staff; AHRQ staff; staff from other Federal agencies; medical students; resident physicians; and others interested in learning more about research network efforts.

Please visit our website, <http://pbrn.ahrq.gov>. On-line registration has been extended through June 1, 2010. After June 1, the on-line registration site will still be available, however, any attendees registered after this time will not have their name on the list of registrants included in the conference packet. After June 11, only on-site registration will be accepted at the hotel.



Contact Us

pbrnrc@umn.edu



Registry Status

Each fall “registered” networks and members of the PBRN listserv are reminded that the Resource Center is conducting its annual data collection. For over five years, network directors and/or coordinators have answered questions about their leadership, membership, participation in studies, and research interests. PBRN networks are asked to indicate if areas of network functioning are strengths or challenges for their network. After networks submit their Registry Surveys, the Resource Center updates the network profiles on the PBRN website and emails each network a copy of its survey responses and a certificate of registration.

Why does the Resource Center collect this information? Because of the growth in the number of PBRNs in the past decade, and their potential for the promotion of research and quality improvement in healthcare delivery, AHRQ supports their efforts through the Resource Center, funding opportunities, and an annual research conference. In return, AHRQ requests that all interested primary care networks register with the AHRQ PBRN Resource Center so that a centralized repository of organizations associated with this growing field can be compiled. This information helps AHRQ learn more about the size and location of networks across the county and the type of research conducted, and provides guidance on resource allocation based on the expressed needs and interests of the participating networks. (See below)

Results: 2010 Annual Registry *

107 registered primary care networks

- 96 established
- 7 developing
- 4 affiliates

# of PBRN members:	51,630 (based on estimates from 102 networks)
# of practices/clinics:	10,155 (based on estimates from 100 networks)
# of patients served:	38,812,864 (based on estimates from 90 networks)

*Indicates data as of 5/18/2010

Access to this information is available through the public PBRN website. Simple or complex searches can be conducted for PBRNs by network type (e.g., family practice, internal medicine, pediatric) or condition studied (e.g., asthma, chronic pain, diabetes), and by geographic coverage. Potential collaborators or mentors can also be identified by areas of common interest or by special populations. The website also hosts an interactive map of the United States that allows users to quickly browse PBRNs according to network location.

Why register? Members of registered networks can participate in both general and topic-specific listservs and in the PBRN Resource Center sponsored web-based seminars (Peer Learning Groups). Additionally, members are encouraged to attend the annual AHRQ National PBRN Research Conference to learn and share with their colleagues face to face. Registration also offers your network direct access and technical assistance support from the PBRN Resource Center on operational and research topics relevant to primary care PBRNs. Furthermore, registered networks and their members will have access to a research portal that can serve as a mechanism for communicating with your network staff and membership, for storing information, and for conducting multi-network studies. See page 3 for more information on the PBRN Research Portal.

PBRN Research Portal (For Registered Members)

The new AHRQ PBRN Research Portal complements the existing PBRN public website by providing research resources and enhancing communication and collaboration among PBRN members. Portal users who are members of a certified network can create study pages, share documents, participate in network discussions, access numerous research resources, and more.

Each portal user has a unique set of privileges based on network and study affiliations. Some resources, such as conference archives and steering committee minutes, are available to all portal users. Other content areas have more limited access. For example, each AHRQ-

certified PBRN can create and manage web pages that are accessible only to its members. Study-specific web pages for single or multi-network studies can also be created.

Attendees at the 2010 AHRQ Annual PBRN Conference will have an opportunity to get hands-on experience with the PBRN Research Portal. If you attend our annual conference, stop by the PBRN Resource Center room (Balance Room) to see a demonstration, try out the portal, and receive training in how to use this tool to support your network. Contact the Resource Center at pbrnrc@umn.edu if you have any questions.

The screenshot shows the PBRN Research Portal website in a Windows Internet Explorer browser window. The browser's address bar shows the URL <http://portal.pbrn.ahrq.gov/portal/server.pt>. The website header includes the AHRQ logo and the text "Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality" and "U.S. Department of Health & Human Services". Below the header, there is a navigation menu with options like "PBRN Public Site", "AHRQ", "Questions?", "Contact Us", "Site Map", "What's New", and "Print". The main content area features a large blue banner with the text "PBRN Primary Care Practice-Based Research Networks" and "Research in Everyday Practice". Below the banner, there is a "Welcome to the PBRN Research Portal" message. A central announcement reads: "Don't miss the AHRQ Annual PBRN Conference June 16-18, 2010, in Bethesda, MD" with a link to "More information". To the right of the announcement is a circular logo for "PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH NETWORKS pbrn". Below the logo is a section titled "How can the research portal help my network?" with a list of bullet points: "Create a study web page and manage access", "Share information with network members", "Use new research tools for study development", "Characterize your network using the PRINS form", "View presentation slides from past PBRN conferences", and "Access tools for new PBRNs". On the far right, there is a "SPOTLIGHT" section with a photo of a group of people and text about "Health Literacy" and "Survey Tools". A left-hand navigation menu lists various portal features like "Home", "About PBRN Resource Center", "Steering Committee", "Research Tools", "Membership Tools", "PBRN Administration", "New PBRNs", "Funding", "Peer Learning Group", "Annual PBRN Conference", "Topics of Interest", "Career Links", "About the PBRN Research Portal", and "PBRN Portal Blog".

Featured Network: The Wisconsin Research and Education Network (WREN)

The Wisconsin Research and Education Network (WREN) was established in 1987 and is one of the five oldest functioning AHRQ-registered PBRNs. Truly a “pioneer” in the area of practice-based research, WREN is a statewide network of over 130 primary care clinicians and academic researchers.¹ Their mission is to improve health outcomes for the people of Wisconsin through education, and by promoting and conducting primary care research in partnership with clinicians and the communities they serve. WREN members are primary care clinicians who actively practice in Wisconsin or academic researchers whose primary place of employment is located in Wisconsin.

For this inaugural issue of the *PBRNews*, **Paul Smith, MD** (network director) and **Michael Grasmick, PhD** (network coordinator), both in the Department of Family Medicine, University of Wisconsin, graciously consented to participate in a discussion with Resource Center staff. We reviewed the history and evolution of the network, strengths and challenges, relationship with the University of Wisconsin CTSA, experience with practice facilitation, and vision for the future.

History: WREN (first known as the Wisconsin Research Network) originally received financial support through cooperation of the Wisconsin Academy of Family Physicians and the University of Wisconsin Department of Family Medicine (UWDFM), under the leadership of John Beasley, MD. At that time there were about 10-15 active members involved in practice-based research. In 2004, WREN ownership was transferred to the UWDFM and the name modified to become the Wisconsin Research and Education Network to emphasize the increasing importance of

educating clinicians, patients, and the public. This shift put the PBRN on shaky ground, and it floundered for a time and almost ceased to exist. Fortunately it was at this time that AHRQ released its first round of support grants. John Temte, MD, former WREN director, received a grant which supported a half-time staff person, and this allowed the network to continue to function.



WREN Leadership Team

Back row (left to right): Mike Grasmick, PhD; Kelly Kwiatkowski, MS; Peggy O' Halloran, MPH; Paul Smith, MD; **Front row** (left to right): Katie Pronschinske, BS; Cindy Colombo, MS; Adina Tucker.

Connection with the Wisconsin CTSA and the Introduction of Practice Facilitation.

WREN's more recent infrastructure support is linked to the NIH Clinical and Translational Science award program, which roughly coincided with Mike joining the PBRN as coordinator in the summer of 2006. Soon after, the Wisconsin School of Medicine applied for a CTSA award. Mike learned, to his surprise,

that, while WREN had a strong national reputation, it was less well-known locally (within its own School of Medicine)! However, WREN soon formed a strong relationship with the CTSA Principal Investigator, who secured matching foundation funds and began providing financial support to WREN. As a result, WREN was able to hire staff and recruit new practices. To increase the capacity of practices to conduct research, WREN has entered into agreements with six practices to provide salary support (20%) for a staff person to serve as liaison between the practice and the network. These practice facilitators are the primary contact between WREN staff and project Principal Investigators (PIs), and facilitate research and quality improvement projects at their practice site. This is a model intended to allow practices to participate in a range of projects with different levels of research intensity, and to build stronger relationships between practices and Principal Investigators. In addition to the

¹Larry A. Green, MD and John Hickner, MD, MSc. A Short History of Primary Care Practice-based Research Networks: From Concept to Essential Research Laboratories. *The Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine* 19:1-10 (2006)

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local practice facilitators, WREN also has Regional Research Coordinators (RRCs) located in different locations around the state that travel to WREN sites for training and assist the local practice facilitators. These efforts have led to a growth in the network, increased visibility, and greater potential and capacity to conduct research.

Network Strengths and Challenges. In addition to support from the Wisconsin School of Medicine and the CTSA, other WREN strengths include the longevity of its relationships with staff (see photo on page 4) and collaborative processes for decision-making. The WREN staff hold weekly teleconferences and monthly, day-long, face-to-face meetings. The WREN Steering Committee, which includes the chair of the Department of Family Medicine, provides operational oversight and can give quick approval for projects. An advisory committee, formed when the CTSI partnership was initiated, meets twice annually and includes the CTSI PI and other experts in public health, health services, and quality improvement. In addition, Mike and Paul were pleased to report that their IRB director is very supportive and understanding of the low-risk nature of most of their research.

WREN’s current challenge is an insufficient number of research projects to keep the full-support practices (those with local practice facilitators) engaged. WREN is actively seeking new relationships with investigators to develop future projects. WREN has been involved in several cross-network studies, including the Survey of Patient Safety (SOPS, with ORPRN), and found that these collaborations – while worthwhile – tend to add another layer of administrative complexity (e.g., IRBs, different network cultures) to conducting practice-based research. As always, WREN leadership finds it challenging to allocate time for proposal writing.

Vision for the future: Due to its infrastructure support from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (UW SMPH) and the Wisconsin Academy of Family Physicians, WREN anticipates being an active participant in moving the practice of medicine forward in Wisconsin and beyond. In the near future they hope to be engaged in two to three RO1 grants, which will allow them to fund research and also support their infrastructure, as well as other smaller, shorter-term projects.

Bibliography



One of the goals of the PBRN Resource Center is to maintain a comprehensive PBRN literature database on the Resource Center website, <http://pbrn.ahrq.gov>. This is accomplished by regularly searching for and identifying literature pertaining to PBRNs.

The PBRN Literature tab on the Resource Center website includes three categories to search on:

- Essential PBRN Literature—Includes key articles about practice-based research.
- PBRN Research by Year—Categorizes the PBRN literature by year of publication.
- PBRN Research by Author—Categorizes the PBRN literature alphabetically by first author.

To be included in the literature database, all citations must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Research must be conducted by a PBRN;
- Research must be conducted by a member/director of a PBRN; and
- Research must be practice-based.

Citations excluded from the PBRN literature database include:

- Those not found in Pub Med/Google Scholar;
- Posters/Meeting Presentations;
- Anything *in press* ; and
- Articles in very specialized and/or local journals.

Please help us keep the bibliography up to date by notifying us of any published articles that should be included.

Please contact the Resource Center (pbrnrc@umn.com) with any questions or additional articles!