



Center for Health Systems Effectiveness

Question and Answers

Q: What is the Center for Health Systems Effectiveness?

The Center was conceived in 2010 and was granted official status as an OHSU research organization in June 2011. The Center conducts research in pursuit of the Triple Aim of improving population health, improving the patient experience, and reducing per capita costs of care.

We do more than research. We're also committed to fostering collaboration and inter-professional practice across OHSU schools and departments. We pursue innovative models of research, evaluation, implementation, and organizational change, with a focus on data-driven analysis. We're committed to the objective evaluation of health systems transformation efforts.

Q: Can you provide an example of how the Center approaches innovative research evaluation, implementation, and organizational change?

It starts with an overarching plan for how we conduct research. We ask not just questions about the quality and value of the research, but also consider the research process itself: We ask, "Could it be undertaken with greater efficiency, and how?" We also are building into our research process a mechanism for self-evaluation.

We're working with OHSU Healthcare to undertake research that brings together traditional health services/clinical research with health care quality improvement methodology.

For example, we're undertaking a study of the ways that uncomplicated low back pain is evaluated and treated at OHSU. This pilot study incorporates traditional research approaches that start with a hypothesis, protocol development, and IRB review, but also include quality improvement techniques, such as process mapping, which have their roots in Lean/Six Sigma methodologies.

The results of this study will be provided to Healthcare leadership and clinicians to determine how to apply the findings to patient care. The implementation phase will likely result in changes in approaches to care. That's the organizational change component of this research.

On a wider scale, we're also working to develop new research directed at studying management practices and their applications to inpatient psychiatric care, cardiology, and obstetrical care. This research evaluates the extent to which management practices associated with high-functioning organizations are observed within the healthcare setting.

Q: What other projects is the Center pursuing?

We are currently pursuing projects that explore the medical home and "shared savings" models, in which providers are potentially rewarded for providing care that reduces overall

costs. The hope is that better coordination of care for the sickest patients can improve the quality of care, keeping the patient healthy and helping them avoid exacerbations that might otherwise translate into a trip to the emergency room or an admission to the hospital.

Q: What is the Triple Aim?

The Triple Aim is a concept proposed by Donald M. Berwick, who suggested that improvements in the U.S. health care system will be achieved by improving patient health and their experience of care, and by reducing per capita costs of care. The Triple Aim has become a shorthand term for approaches to health systems improvement that acknowledge that improvement efforts must consider the inter-dependencies among these elements.

Q: How do you foster collaborations?

To bring together researchers, we are holding periodic events that invite health services researchers working in varied disciplines, to come together for networking, presentations, and brainstorming sessions. Toward that goal, we have established what the Center calls “Mitch Dinners.” These dinners, modeled on events sponsored by OHSU Professor Emeritus, Mitch Greenlick, were originally designed as opportunities for early-career faculty to mix with experienced researchers. The CHSE dinners have been attended by researchers from OHSU, and the Portland and Southwest Washington areas, and have addressed topics such as the Oregon Health Study and the newly formed Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI).

CHSE also has sponsored a strategic retreat involving OHSU faculty and leaders, who have participated in defining the Center’s direction. Future retreats will focus on developing collaborative research projects.

In research, CHSE both leads research that draws on the expertise of investigators working in such disciplines as public health, mental health, comparative effectiveness research, and family medicine, and provides health economics and statistical services to health services research being undertaken across OHSU.

Q: Where is the Center located?

The center was initially started with the assistance of the Oregon Clinical and Translational Research Institute (OCTRI), with support from OHSU President Joe Robertson. In July of 2011, CHSE was established as an independent organization at OHSU.

Q: Who are CHSE’s stakeholders?

The short answer is that our stakeholders are health services researchers and policy makers working in Oregon and Southwestern Washington.

The Center was created through the vision and support of clinicians, faculty, and researchers from every OHSU mission – Education, Research and Healthcare. In gathering ideas and suggestions for the Center, we have engaged and collaborated with over 60 researchers, policy-makers, and other stakeholders throughout the State, including individuals from Portland State University, Providence Center for Outcomes Research and Education (CORE), Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research, and the Oregon Health Authority.

Q: What is health services research?

A: Health services can be broadly defined. AcademyHealth, typically considered the largest and most influential organization dedicated to advancing the field, defines health services research as the study of the ways in which social factors, financing systems, organizational structures and processes, health technologies, and personal behaviors affect access to health care, the quality and cost of health care, and ultimately our health and well-being. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has defined the main goals of health services research as identifying the most effective ways to organize, manage, finance, and deliver high quality care, reduce medical errors, and improve patient safety.

Q: How does health services research relate to comparative effectiveness research?

A: Comparative effectiveness research (CER) is generally considered one discipline within the broader umbrella of health services research. CER provides evidence on the effectiveness, benefits, and harms of different treatment options. Health services research uses many of the same research methods used in comparative effectiveness research, but may include investigations on a broader range of topics (such as the impact of a new insurance benefit design).

Q: OHSU already has the Center for Evidence-based Policy (CEbP) and the Oregon Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC). How does the Center for Health Systems Effectiveness fit within their work?

A: The Center is building collaborations with these organizations. Their expertise complements our efforts. The leaders of both organizations have been involved in helping to define our focus. Some of our differences are:

- The CEbP serves policy makers; their research is directed at conducting evidence-based research that can inform policy questions. They have built successful interstate collaborations addressing health care questions. They also have a distinctive expertise in collaborative processes and collaborative governance.
- The Oregon EPC conducts systematic reviews of healthcare topics for federal and state agencies and private foundations. They gather and evaluate clinical research studies and identify the collective experience of researchers focusing on a particular disease, condition, or treatment.
- A central focus of CHSE is to build collaborations involving the many health services researchers within OHSU, regionally, and in Oregon. We seek opportunities to bring together researchers from the CEbP and the EPC. We envision our emphasis in providing a seedbed for research, drawing together the expertise concentrated in the CEbP and the EPC, with additional expertise in health economics.

Q: How would you characterize the Center's distinctive strengths?

CHSE will be building staff expertise in health economics, statistical programming and data analysis. We already have a core research staff experienced in health systems research and in analyzing large datasets.

Additionally, we apply a systems-oriented perspective to our work. This perspective requires that we think beyond the immediate focus of a particular research study to consider that study within the wider context of other ongoing health services research. We seek to foster a body of research, which through its collective focus, stimulate change. This perspective may be broader than many traditional research centers, which focus exclusively on one discipline or approach to their work.

Q: Why was the Center created?

A: The Center was conceived by Eric Orwoll, Director of OCTRI. He recognized in 2010 that OHSU was rich in health services researchers who are dispersed across a multitude of departments and schools. He recognized that OHSU could leverage those strengths and bring tremendous benefit to Oregon's health systems challenges if we brought together researchers not only at OHSU, but working at other Oregon Universities and research entities.

Q: Who runs the Center and where does it fit into the OHSU management structure?

The Center Director is John McConnell, PhD. Dr. McConnell is a health economist with appointments in the Department of Emergency Medicine, the Department of Public Health & Preventive Medicine, and the Division of Management.

Dr. McConnell is accountable to the OHSU Executive Leadership Team, and as an entity within the School of Medicine, also reports through the leadership chain that reports to Dean Richardson.

CHSE has a Steering Committee, who provide strategic guidance to the Center. Steering Committee members are:

- Tom Becker, MD, PhD, Chair, Department of Public Health & Preventive Medicine
- Michael Bleich, PhD, RN, Dean, School of Nursing
- Aaron Caughey, MD, PhD, Chair, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology
- Rick Deyo, MD, MPH, Professor, Family Medicine, and Director, OCTRI Community & Practice Research Program
- Chuck Kilo, MD, MPH, Chief Medical Officer, OHSU Healthcare
- Don Lollar, EdD, Associate Director, Child Development and Rehabilitation Services and Director, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

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