

PHSSR Inside Track-August 2012



Perspectives in PHSSR: Public Health Informatics

by **David Ross**, Sc.D., Director, Public Health Informatics Institute

A recent visit with Doug Scutchfield (“Scutch”) and Glen Mays offered the opportunity to consider how public health informatics – a discipline involving information management,

technology and public health practice – relates to and supports the larger PHSSR agenda. In a [previous issue of InsideTrack](#), Dr. Debra Pérez of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation pointed out that “the ‘why’ of PHSSR is about being accountable to the nation’s most vulnerable and the belief that what can happen to any one of us, happens to all of us.” I wholly subscribe to Debra’s point of view that we need to constantly clarify why we do our work, not merely how we do it. In fact, within the national collaborative projects in our [Requirements Lab](#) line of work, the [Public Health Informatics Institute](#) teaches an approach to business process analysis that begins by framing the processes of work (the “what” and “how”) *within the reasons we do the work* (the “why”), then goes further to translate our goals into measurable outcomes, so that we can track success.

The practice of informatics enables us to transform *data*, through application of the experience, knowledge and wisdom of seasoned public health practitioners, into *information* that can be put to use to make a difference in the health of many people. That information becomes the mirror that public health holds up to reflect a picture of

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ABOUT PHSSR - The emerging field of public health services and systems

research (PHSSR) examines questions that relate to the financing, organization and delivery of public health services - and how those factors translate to population health.

the community's health. And yet, although we know that information is an important tool for improving public health, we have little evidence about when and how to improve an agency's information management capabilities to achieve a measurable impact on the health of specific populations.

PHSSR is about exactly that – knowing what works, and promoting high quality, evidence-based practices to improve population health. This is why I endorse more attention to and funding for PHSSR. The public health industry needs to be serious about making it integral to our practice, and this requires a long-term commitment by all senior leaders.

Our discussion with Scutch and Glen stressed the importance of sharing with PHSSR researchers the workflow documentation from our [Requirements Lab](#) projects, so that they may benefit from access to public health practitioners' own descriptions of the actual work activities entailed in core public health functions. It is clear that this work is highly supportive of and synergistic with the ongoing research agenda. Together, we made a commitment to assuring that our informatics programs effectively support PHSSR.

Research

Recent PHHSR Publications

[Systems science methods in public health: dynamics, networks, and agents.](#)

Luke DA, Stamatakis KA.

Annu Rev Public Health. 2012 Apr;33:357-76. Epub 2012 Jan 3. Review.

PMID: 22224885 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

[Related citations](#)

[Using GIS for administrative decision-making in a local public health setting.](#)

Taylor DM, Yeager VA, Ouimet C, Menachemi N.

Public Health Rep. 2012 May-Jun;127(3):347-53. No abstract available.

PMID: 22547869 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

[Related citations](#)

[Actions occurring at the state and local levels of public health.](#)

Huy J.

Public Health Rep. 2012 May-Jun;127(3):243. No abstract available.

PMID: 22547852 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

[Related citations](#)

[Obesity Prevention: The Impact of Local Health Departments.](#)

Chen ZA, Roy K, Gotway Crawford CA.

Health Serv Res. 2012 Jul 20. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6773.2012.01447.x.

[Epub ahead of print]

PMID: 22816510 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

[Related citations](#)

New Issue of [Frontiers in PHSSR](#) Highlights Know-Do Gap

Narrowing the “know-do” gap in public health is the focus of the current issue of [Frontiers in PHSSR](#), a new online, open access journal that brings the latest findings in PHSSR to the field through rapid-cycle dissemination.

In the latest issue, Allen et al identify administrative and management evidence-based practices to inform ongoing initiatives in local public health system quality improvement, accreditation processes and performance. The article presents administrative elements in workforce development, leadership, organizational climate and culture, relationships and partnerships, and financial processes that local health departments can address at modest cost within a few years or less. Local public health systems can further identify, implement and evaluate evidence-based administrative practices. Read the full article [here](#).

Frontiers features peer-reviewed articles that offer brief descriptions of preliminary findings from an ongoing or recently completed empirical study or quality improvement project that answers a question of importance regarding the organization, financing, and delivery of public health services; the structure, operation, and management of public health delivery systems; the application of quality improvement methods in public health settings; and/or the impact of these endeavors on population health. Findings must have the potential to guide future public health practice, health policy, and research.

The July issue of *Frontiers* also features [Keeneland Conference sessions](#).

Results of Effort to Enumerate Public Health Workforce Outlined in New Report

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) have issued a report on a collaborative effort to enumerate the public health workforce, [Strategies for Enumerating the U.S. Governmental Public Health Workforce](#). Prepared by the Centers of Excellence in Public Health Workforce at the University of Michigan and the University of Kentucky, the report describes the findings, results and recommendations of the first phase of an ongoing effort.

PHLR Commissioning Research on High Priority Areas

The Strategic and Targeted Research Program was created to fill [critical gaps](#) in the public health law evidence base. In the next year, [Public Health Law Research](#) (PHLR) will commission research on high

priority topics. Currently, PHLR is gathering suggestions of pressing research questions the field needs answered. All interested individuals are welcome to make submissions. This is not a request for research proposals, and there is no required format for suggestions.

PHLR welcomes ideas that demonstrate their importance through two key characteristics:

- Value to Public Health: The law or legal practice to be studied has the potential to significantly improve health outcomes.
- Relevance to Policy or Practice: The study data will be valuable to policy-makers or practitioners when it is delivered.

Please submit ideas using this online form: <http://bit.ly/KB3eEH>

Support for the QI Award Program is provided by the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#).

HRSA Announces Update of Area Resource File

HRSA recently announced that the 2011-2012 version of the Area Resource File (ARF) has been updated.

Established in 1975, the ARF is a health resource information database used extensively by researchers, planners and policy-makers to obtain data on all counties in the United States.

Updates include: health workforce (e.g., physicians by specialty, dentists, physician assistants, certified nurse midwives); health professions shortage areas; health facilities (e.g., hospitals, rural health clinics, ambulatory surgery centers, nursing facilities); health expenditures (e.g., hospital facilities expenditures, Medicare Advantage payment rates); demographics (e.g., population by race, poverty, income, health insurance and Medicaid eligibles); and more.

The 2011-2012 file can now be downloaded at no cost in ASCII and Access formats. Visit www.arf.hrsa.gov for a complete listing of data and instructions for downloading the file. The ARF is also available in HRSA's Data Warehouse at <http://datawarehouse.hrsa.gov/ARF.aspx>.

Under a new contract effective July 1, HRSA will be expanding the ARF to include state and national level data. In addition, new data elements, assessment tools and mapping capability will make the ARF even more valuable to researchers and consumers.

Junior Investigator Recipient Completes Work on Core Functions and Effectiveness of Local Public Health System



[Amber Hughes Sinclair](#), a recipient of the 2010 Public Health Services and Systems Research Junior Investigator Award from the National Coordinating



investigator Award from the National Coordinating Center for PHSSR to fund her dissertation, recently completed her doctoral dissertation on “Core Functions and Effectiveness of the Local Public Health System in the United States” at the University of Georgia’s School of Public and International Affairs in the Public Administration & Policy program.

Sinclair’s dissertation examined the impact of two public health system characteristics on effectiveness in delivering assessment, policy development and assurance core public health functions: the local health department’s (LHD) contribution to core function effort, and the participation of other agencies/organizations in core function activities.

Sinclair’s research indicated that local health department contribution to effort and overall greater participation of other types of agencies/organizations are significantly associated with perceived effectiveness of public health core functions. As these factors increase, perceived effectiveness increases. The significance of participation of individual types of agencies/organizations varies by core functions area, with the exception of local government agencies and hospitals being significant for all three core function areas. More participation of these types of agencies/organizations is associated with greater perceived effectiveness.

Sinclair is a research scientist at the New York State Department of Health, where she studies cancer care quality measures in the Medicaid and Medicare populations.

Southern Regional Education Board Awards PHSSR Researcher With Funds for Professional Development Support



[Sharla Smith](#), a Ph.D. candidate in the Health System Research graduate program at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, received a Dissertation Award from the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB). The SREB Doctoral program is part of a nationwide initiative to produce more minority Ph.D.s and encourage them to seek faculty positions. The SREB Doctoral Program is supported by the National Science Foundation to achieve two broad goals: increasing the likelihood of minority students completing a Ph.D.; and encourage and prepare scholars for a career as a successful college faculty member.

The Dissertation Award provides a one-year stipend, university-covered tuition and fees, a research allowance and professional development support. The award also provides training through the annual Compact for Faculty Diversity Institute on Teaching and

mentoring.

Learn from South Carolina's Successful Experience with Quality Improvement (Video)

Faced with challenges including budget cuts, reduction in staff, low at the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) pursued quality improvement (QI) training to improve their situation. Through training from the Public Health Foundation, DHEC staff learned how to use QI tools and techniques to analyze their current challenges and then identify opportunities for improvement.

[Click here](#) to view videos of South Carolina's journey from challenge to improvement using quality improvement tools and techniques.

CE Credit Available for 2012 Keeneland Conference Sessions

The National Coordinating Center for PHSSR has partnered with CE Central to provide continuing education credits to the health care community. [Click here](#) to visit the website and take an online course.

AcademyHealth Update

Slides from the 11th Annual PHSR Interest Group Meeting are on [AcademyHealth's website](#).

Blog posts about AcademyHealth's Annual Research Meeting are posted, including about the PHSR [Article of the Year](#), the PHSR [IG meeting](#), and the [Annual Research Meeting](#).

PBRN

Reforming Public Health: Colorado Monitors Effects of Statewide Initiative

During the July Public Health PBRN Virtual Meeting, Colorado's Lisa VanRaemdonck described several research projects underway to evaluate the service delivery and system changes precipitated by the state's 2008 public health system reform legislation. The law's numerous provisions included the creation of a dedicated public health fund, the establishment of minimum qualifications for local public health directors and basic requirements for local boards of health, the development of core services and performance standards for local public health, and authorization of a new formula-based funding mechanism for distributing state general fund and tobacco settlement dollars to local public health agencies. Using such data sources as the NACCHO Profile, annual reports, interviews and surveys, a Colorado PBRN pilot study has tracked changes in local public health system structure before, during, and after implementation of the reform. Findings revealed that the reform has had some of its most immediate effects on management and local government structure.

immediate effects on governance, as local governments formalized the selection, composition, and decision-making processes of their local boards of health to comply with the law's requirements. These early structural and operational changes could have longer-run public health implications if they empower boards to make more informed and timely decisions.

Relatively little change has been observed to date in local public health leadership characteristics despite the law's creation of minimum qualifications, likely reflecting the limited supply of master's-prepared public health professionals within the state, recession-driven fiscal constraints on local government recruiting and hiring practices, and provisions in the law that allow for grandfathering of incumbent leaders and substituting on-the-job experience for training. This component of the law may have larger effects over time as the state's public health workforce and economy expand. Through a related study, the Regional Approaches to Local Public Health Delivery project, the PBRN is collecting primary interview, survey, and mapping data to examine the effects of the statewide reform on regional approaches to service delivery that are currently used within Colorado. The Colorado PBRN plans to continue and enhance these lines of investigation through its participation in the Multi-Network Practice and Outcome Variation Examination (MPROVE) study, which is now underway. If you have questions about these or other research projects of the Colorado PBRN, please contact Lisa VanRaemdonck at lisa@calpho.org and visit the network's [website](#). A recording of the July edition of the PBRN Monthly Virtual Meeting will be available on the public health PBRN website shortly.

More "R"s that Matter: Regional Variation, Regionalization, Rankings, and Rapid-Cycle Improvement

Research from the Public Health PBRNs featured prominently at the 2012 AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting in Orlando in June, examining four important "R"s in public health delivery. Nancy Winterbauer, a founding leader of the Florida PBRN and now a collaborator in the North Carolina PBRN, presented findings from a quick-strike study to examine local public health responses to county-level health rankings released through the County Health Rankings report across Florida. Another session featured Justine Hyde (Massachusetts PBRN), Lisa VanRaemdonck (Colorado PBRN), Bill Livingood (Georgia and Florida PBRNs), and Glen Mays (Coordinating Center) presenting a cluster of related studies on regionalized public health delivery approaches during a session entitled, "Right-sizing Public Health Delivery: Regionalization and Multi-Jurisdictional Models."

As part of another session on quality improvement research, Bill Livingood presented the results of a health department rapid-cycle

quality improvement intervention that succeeded in boosting immunization coverage rates in Duval County, Fla. At the Public Health Systems Research Interest Group Meeting, Betty Bekemeier (Washington PBRN), Michael Morris (Florida and Arkansas PBRNs), and Glen Mays presented research from the Public Health Activities and Services Tracking (PHAST) Study that examines regional variation in public health service delivery across states and communities. More than 20 other studies related to the theme of “Public Health, Prevention, and Population Health” were presented during the meeting, including sessions devoted to the economics of prevention, economic modeling techniques used in the new Congressional Budget Office report on the budgetary and health effects of tobacco excise taxes, and the Institute of Medicine’s new report on public health financing. The slides from these presentations are now available on the AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting [website](#) and the [Public Health Systems Research Interest Group page](#) and video recordings of selected sessions are also available.

Policy

Tell Us Your Story

PHSSR is having an impact on public health policy. Tell us how your research is important to building the evidence-base and affecting change in the nation's health. Send your story to news@publichealthsystems.org. Stories will be featured on our [YouTube channel](#).

Funding

Mentored Research Scientist Development Awards

DEADLINE: Aug. 8, 2012

Applications for a new round of [funding opportunities](#) from the National Coordinating Center for PHSSR and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) are due Aug. 8. The goal of the funding is to develop the next generation of researchers who will examine how the organization, financing and delivery of public health services affect population health.

The research resulting from these awards will provide relevant information to public health practitioners and policy-makers, contributing evidence that is urgently needed to improve the population’s health and the quality, efficiency and equity in public health practice, improving population health.

As many as eight Mentored Research Scientist Development Awards of up to \$100,000 each for two years will support early-career investigators and enable them to establish independent research

careers in PHSSR. The awards are designed to enhance the researchers' career development experiences, help them attain advanced research skills in PHSSR and position them for other funding opportunities.

Click [here](#) to view full details and learn how to apply.

NNPHI Announces Call for Proposals for Second Cycle of QI Award Program

DEADLINE: Sept. 10, 2012

The [National Network of Public Health Institutes](#) (NNPHI) has announced a new Call for Proposals (CFP) to participate in the second cycle of the QI Award Program. Through the program, NNPHI will provide health departments with \$5,000 awards coupled with 15 hours of individualized quality improvement (QI) project that results in measureable change. Selected health departments will also be provided with additional opportunities, such as educational webinars with QI experts and sponsored attendance at a national accreditation and QI-focused meeting (the Open Forum Meeting for Quality Improvement in Public Health).

The purpose of this QI Award Program is to support health departments to become more proficient in the adoption and application of QI and to meet the accreditation standards and measures set by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#) (PHAB).

To apply and for more information on the program, visit the [COPPHI](#) page of the NNPHI website.

Events

Webinar on Transforming Public Health: Making Decisions in a Changing World

Aug. 10, 2012 from 2:30-4 p.m. ET

This is an unprecedented period of change and opportunity for governmental public health.

- The health system is going through major transformations, not just due to the passage and implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), but also driven by the need to create more integrated approaches to prevention, primary care, and overall health to be more efficient and effective.
- The health challenges facing Americans in the 21st century are increasingly chronic, rather than infectious, diseases.
- There is growing recognition that where people live, learn, work, and play can be as important to health outcomes as medical intervention.
- Technology, particularly health information technology,

provides new opportunities for understanding and improving the public's health.

Amid these new opportunities also come challenges for public health departments. The worst global recession since the Great Depression has cut investments in public health and other services across all levels of government, threatening governmental public health departments' capacity including in new areas of emphasis.

Join the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, RESOLVE and public health leaders from around the country on Friday, Aug. 10, at 2:30 p.m. ET for a conversation about how public health officials are responding to these opportunities and challenges and helping define a 21st Century public health system.

[Click here](#) to register for the Aug. 10 webinar, Transforming Public Health: Making Decisions in a Changing World.

Scheduled Speakers

- Abbey Cofsky, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Abby Dilly, RESOLVE
- David Fleming, Director and Health Officer for Public Health, Seattle & King County
- Terry Cline, Commissioner, Oklahoma State Department of Health
- Paul Kuehnert, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Read the final report

[*Transforming Public Health: Emerging Concepts for Decision-Making in a Changing Public Health World.*](#)

[Click here](#) to read a Q&A with Bobby Pestronk of NACCHO and Paul Jarris of ASTHO about *Transforming Public Health: Emerging Concepts for Decision-Making in a Changing Public Health World.*

For additional information about the report or webinar, please contact Chrissie Juliano, cjuliano@resolv.org, at RESOLVE.

National Association of Local Boards of Health 2012: Aug. 8-10 in Atlanta, GA

The [2012 Annual NALBOH Conference](#) is designed to provide attendees with information about past public health achievements, current public health priorities, and the role of governance in shaping the future of public health.

American Public Health Association Annual Meeting: Oct. 27-31 in San Francisco, CA

The [140th APHA Annual Meeting](#) features the theme, Prevention and Wellness Across the Life Span. If you're presenting a PHSSR-related topic at the meeting, please tell us about it. Send information about your presentation to news@publichealthsystems.org for inclusion in a handout to conference attendees interested in learning more about PHSSR and the latest research in the field.

Visit PHSSR in [Booth 2225](#) in the Exhibit Hall!

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