

7-18-2023

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Recommended Citation

Horberg MA, Simons S. Leveraging the strength of collaboration in rapidly changing times: the 29th annual conference of the Health Care Systems Research Network. *J Patient Cent Res Rev.* 2023;10:142-5. doi: [10.17294/2330-0698.2061](https://doi.org/10.17294/2330-0698.2061)

Published quarterly by Midwest-based health system Advocate Aurora Health and indexed in PubMed Central, the Journal of Patient-Centered Research and Reviews (JPCRR) is an open access, peer-reviewed medical journal focused on disseminating scholarly works devoted to improving patient-centered care practices, health outcomes, and the patient experience.

Leveraging the Strength of Collaboration in Rapidly Changing Times: The 29th Annual Conference of the Health Care Systems Research Network

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Abstract

On February 21, 2023, the 29th annual conference of the Health Care Systems Research Network (HCSRN) kicked off at the Sheraton Downtown Denver with more than 320 participants from 20 HCSRN member institutions. Attendees gathered, in person, to reconnect and network during the 3-day conference, which featured the theme *Leveraging the Power of the Network in Rapidly Changing Times*. This paper highlights takeaways from the conference's plenary sessions, panel discussions, and abstract presentations. (*J Patient Cent Res Rev*. 2023;10:142-145.)

Since the founding of the Health Care Systems Research Network (HCSRN), its annual conference has been an eagerly anticipated gathering of members and non-members, researchers and study managers, clinicians and health system leaders, funding agency representatives, and patient partners. It serves as a venue for research teams to disseminate scientific findings, facilitate new collaborations, and share hard-won insights about conducting research in real-world care delivery settings. Known for providing generous networking opportunities and leading-edge science, the conference also provides a forum to share scientific findings from HCSRN research projects and to spur collaboration on research initiatives that improve health and health care for individuals and populations.

As a result of established partnerships with federal funders, universities, other research organizations, and through leadership in important national initiatives, HCSRN is an integral part of the research landscape in the United States.¹ Some of HCSRN's notable cornerstone projects include the Aging Initiative, CDC Vaccine Safety Datalink,² the FDA Sentinel Initiative,³ the National Institutes of Health Pragmatic Trials Collaboratory, and the Mental Health Research Network. HCSRN supports public-domain collaborative

research that aims to benefit patients, communities, and the broader population.

Kaiser Permanente Colorado (KPCO) served as the informal host for the 3-day conference. Claudia Steiner, MD, MPH, executive director of the Institute for Health Research at KPCO and professor of health systems science at the Kaiser Permanente Bernard J. Tyson School of Medicine welcomed attendees to the Mile High City. Abdul Shaikh, PhD, MSHc, population health analyst for Amazon Web Services provided the opening plenary session with his presentation, "Leveraging the Power of the HCSRN Network to Accelerate Progress on Health Equity." Using examples from his career spanning government, academia, and industry — including HCSRN member organizations — he shared insights and learnings from new initiatives and approaches to accelerate progress on health equity for clinical translational research.

State of the Network

Governing Board Chair Michael Horberg, MD, MAS, of Kaiser Permanente Mid-Atlantic States shared many updates during the State of the Network address. Recognizing the visionary leaders who founded HCSRN in 1994, Dr. Horberg also expressed his deep appreciation for the leadership of Immediate Past Chair Robert Greenlee, PhD, MPH. Last year, Dr. Greenlee orchestrated the transition of HCSRN to Capitol Hill Management Services, headquartered in Albany, New York. Now a designated nonprofit organization, HCSRN has increased capacity and resources to further its mission. Dr. Horberg reviewed the transition plan, HQ³: A Bridge Plan to Our Future, which is aimed at ensuring HCSRN can continue

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to provide quality membership services and programming during the conversion period.

Dr. Horberg noted that for the remainder of 2023, the organizational focus will include: Engagement → Value for participation; Collaboration → Funded opportunities; Sustainability → Organizational Transformation/New Central Team; and VDW operations → Working group leads and new data development.

An update on HCSRN's Virtual Data Warehouse (VDW), a common data model designed to support multi-health system research, included the plan for a new social determinants of health table. The VDW consists of clinical and claims data mapped to a common format, creating efficiencies for data extraction, collection, and management.⁴ Stacey Honda, MD, PhD, of Kaiser Permanente Hawaii is serving as the VDW Implementation Group Board Liaison following the retirement of Lois Lamerato, PhD. Appreciation was extended to VDW Scientific Lead Mark Jurkovich, DDS, VDW Technical Lead Reesa Laws, VDW Coordinator Celeste Machen, and respective workgroup leads for their tireless work on behalf of the organization.

The public facing HCSRN website debuted on March 1 with a fresh look. A plan to replace the Alfresco® platform is in development. Assessment of VDW user needs has been conducted to assist in identifying an alternative with enhanced functionality, ease of use, and facilitation of collaboration. The State of the Network address concluded with a special acknowledgment of Anand Shah, MD, MS, and Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit Trust for their generous funding support of the conference. Dr. Horberg announced that the 2024 conference will be held April 9–11 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Award Recipients

After the State of the Network, HCSRN members celebrated their colleagues. Hung Fu Tseng, PhD, MPH, of Kaiser Permanente Research was recognized for the Paper of the Year, titled “Effectiveness of mRNA-1273 against SARS-CoV-2 Omicron and Delta variants” and published in *Nature Medicine*.⁵ This award acknowledges the paper that has or is likely to have an impact on science, research methods, health care delivery, policy, or patient outcomes.

The Multisite Collaborator Award was presented to Ingrid Binswanger, MD, MPH, MS, of KPCO for her work on “The association between buprenorphine treatment duration and mortality: a multi-site cohort study of people who discontinued treatment.” Collaborative sites included in the study were KPCO, Kaiser

Permanente Southern California, Kaiser Permanente Northern California, Kaiser Permanente Mid-Atlantic States, Henry Ford Health, Geisinger, and UMass Chan Medical School/Meyers Health Care Institute. This award highlights collaborative work among HCSRN members that utilize the VDW.

Assiamira Ferrara, MD, PhD, of the UPSTREAM Center was recognized as the Mentor of the Year. Her colleagues from Kaiser Permanente Northern California, the University of Tennessee, and University of California-Davis nominated her for this prestigious award, which acknowledges an individual who has provided guidance and motivation and shares knowledge, expertise, and wisdom.

Apoorva Pradhan, MD, MPH, of Geisinger received the Early Career Investigator Award for her abstract titled “Impact of a multi-faceted best practice alert among patients with headaches seen in primary care.” Her abstract was reviewed on overall quality as well as specific criteria including research results, data quality, practical application, and overall presentation.

Two poster awards were presented. Poster Session 1 winners were Robert Neuman, MD, of Kaiser Permanente Georgia and Rochele Heflin-Wiley, RN, BSN, MSA, CCM, of The Southeast Permanente Medical Group, Inc., for their poster titled “Predicting 30-day hospital readmission using machine learning in a non-hospital-based integrated healthcare system.” The winner of Poster Session 2 was Geoffrey Kahn, PhD, of Henry Ford Health for his poster, “A review of the literature and publicly available data on medical aid in dying in the US.”

Workshops and Special Sessions

On February 22, a special interest session was held on navigating the new National Institutes of Health (NIH) data management and sharing (DMS) policy. The intent of this new policy was to promote the sharing of scientific data to accelerate biomedical research discovery. A panel of experts including, Lawrence Kushi, ScD, of Kaiser Permanente Division of Research, Andrea Burnett-Hartman, PhD, MPH, of KPCO Institute for Health Research, and Alex Cramer of Kaiser Foundation Research Institute shared their knowledge and expertise to address how the new policy will impact research and proposal development. Fielding questions — eg, What research is subject to the new DMS policy? What scientific data need to be shared? When does data need to be shared and for what period of time? How do we select a repository? — the panel offered guidance to enable more efficient implementation of the policy within HCSRN member institutions.

The final plenary session titled “How do health equity investigators navigate the intersection of scientific inquiry and personal experience?” highlighted the experiences of scientists and research staff who both identify as members of communities that are typically studied in health equity research and conduct their own research within these communities. The panel included Kanetha Wilson, PhD, of Kaiser Permanente Georgia; Katherine Sanchez, PhD, LCSW, of Baylor, Scott & White Research Institute; Leslie Wright, MA, of KPCO; and Divya Subramaniam, PhD, MPH, of Saint Louis University School of Medicine; and was moderated by Karen Coleman, PhD, of Kaiser Permanente Southern California. The panel discussed how they navigate the intersection of scientific inquiry and personal experience as well as experiences they have had with systematic implicit/explicit bias and how they have learned to overcome the impact of this bias on their work and careers.

In addition to the conference sessions, the NIH Preconference Workshop took place on February 20. Titled “Changing trials for changing times: essentials of embedded pragmatic clinical trials,” this workshop introduced concepts in the design, conduct, and implementation of embedded pragmatic clinical trials (ePCTs), with a particular focus on methods relevant to health services researchers. ePCTs are randomized trials conducted within health systems and use streamlined procedures and existing infrastructure to answer important medical questions for patients, providers, and health system leaders.⁶

The final session was the in-person half-day meeting of the VDW Implementation Group, which brought together nearly 40 programmers, coders, site data managers, researchers, and other staff members. On the agenda was the history of workgroups, with a spotlight on the Utilization workgroup. There was a robust discussion on exploring toolsets beyond SAS[®] software (SAS Institute Inc), how the toolsets are being used, what challenges are being faced, and what benefits the new tools bring to HCSRN. Closing out the day was a conversation regarding those sites that have implemented their VDW on a cloud server and the trials/tribulations they experienced. This gathering of the VDW Implementation Group is always a productive time that allows members to catch up, discuss timely topics, and advance the work of one of HCSRN’s greatest assets.

Concurrent, Poster, and Panel Presentations

Looking at the conference by the numbers, there were 139 accepted abstracts and panel presentations, resulting in 24 concurrent sessions, 8 panel presentations, and 33 posters. Nine ancillary meetings of scientific interest groups and research project teams were held to advance

their current work. This all came together due to the dedicated efforts of 15 Annual Conference Planning Committee members and 36 on-site volunteers who planned and implemented the 3-day conference.

Oral abstract presentations in the concurrent sessions covered broad categories, including cancer, COVID-19 and other vaccine-related conditions, mental health, research methods, chronic conditions, maternal, child and family health, aging, addiction science/substance use, and genomics/precision medicine. Panel sessions addressed a wide range of topics, such as:

- Learnings from a large-scale implementation-effectiveness trial in pediatric primary care to prevent firearm injuries: the ASPIRE trial;
- Building capacity for social health co-development, implementation, and evaluation of integration online training module for primary care providers;
- How to use human-centered design to develop and integrate a tool into routine care and identify associated benefits;
- Leveraging the power of the Health Care Systems Research Network to build a prospective cohort study among HCSRN and non-HCSRN sites;
- Pharmacy service and medication-related research for chronic conditions: current status and future directions; and
- Assessing telehealth services in mental health and wellness encounters across multiple regions of an integrated health system.

You can find all the accepted scientific abstracts presented at the 2023 HCSRN Annual Conference in this issue of the *Journal of Patient-Centered Research and Reviews*.⁷

In summary, attendees of this year’s conference learned about innovations from engaging speakers, were exposed to late-breaking research, and benefitted from an inclusive environment for networking and collaboration. Looking ahead, the 2024 HCSRN Annual Conference will be held April 9–11 in Milwaukee. We hope to see you there.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to the HCSRN Annual Conference Planning Committee: Karen Coleman (co-chair), Corinna Koebnick, Claudia Nau, and Rachel Zucker of Kaiser Permanente Southern California; Claudia Steiner (co-chair) and Andrea Paolino of Kaiser Permanente Colorado; Eva Chang and Veronica Fitzpatrick of Advocate Aurora Research Institute; Leslie Hinyard of Advanced HEALTH Data (AHEAD) Institute; Stephanie Hooker-Showalter of HealthPartners; Morgan Justice of Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute; Deborah Ling-Grant of Southern California Permanente Medical Group; Dea Papajorgji-Taylor of Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research; Ivana Vaughn of Henry Ford Health; and Kanetha Wilson of Kaiser Permanente Georgia.

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