



Palo Alto

Center of Excellence

Director: Steven M. Asch, MD, MPH

Executive Summary for Fiscal Year 2011

The Center for Health Care Evaluation: VA HSR&D Center of Excellence was established in October, 1985 and now comprises more than 100 staff, including 30 core investigators. In the past year, the Center has sustained a high level of productivity while facing and successfully negotiating significant challenges related to hiring a permanent Director and to planning and carrying out the relocation of the Center.

The Center's research has focused on three critical health care domains: (1) treatment of substance use and psychiatric disorders; (2) clinical decision making, screening, and diagnostic assessment; and (3) the organization and delivery of health care services. Following Steering Committee recommendations, we view the diversity of investigators as a Center strength and have continued to encourage projects at the intersections of these domains. In the past year, new research funding was obtained in each of these areas as well as for projects that represent their cross fertilization. Each of these areas will contribute to the planning process now underway to define the focus of our forthcoming COIN application.

Over the past year, the Center's emphasis on implementation across its substantive domains remained strong, with core staff serving key leadership roles in four QUERIs. Three QUERIs (substance abuse, congestive heart failure, and HIV/HCV) are now housed wholly or in part at the Center. CHCE core staff continued collaborative projects with other HSR&D Centers and close working relationships with VISN 21 and VA Central Office groups. The Center maintained a high level of productivity in terms of publications and presentations, and core staff continued to influence practice and policy through significant local and national roles in and outside VA. As in past years, CHCE training programs were able to recruit highly qualified post-doctoral and physician fellows.

During the past year, Center staff were involved in planning and carrying out the Center move from a building slated for demolition into a newly renovated building a short distance away. All Center personnel were moved as a group, facilitating continuation of existing collaborations. The Palo Alto Division of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System, the lead facility of the Center, where some key Center personnel are located, and the Menlo Park Division, where most Center personnel are housed, are both about three miles from Stanford University, our primary academic affiliate. The Health Economics Resource Center, the Program Evaluation and Resource Center, which focuses on substance use disorders, and researchers in the National Center for PTSD remain co-located with the Center's main offices. A number of initiatives have been introduced to improve integration and to support links across these potential boundaries, both geographic and topical. For example, an Executive Committee with diverse membership has been formed to provide the Director with input and strategic guidance, and the weekly research forum can be accessed through a conference call and will be held at the Menlo Park and Palo Alto Divisions on a rotating basis.

Plans for the coming year are to adapt this well-functioning Center to changing VA priorities, including planning for a COIN application, expanding clinical and operations partnerships, both locally and nationally, and encouraging active participation in a number of CREATE proposals, reflecting the breadth of expertise brought together by the Center. With a new Director in place, we plan to make changes at the Associate Director level in order to replace Dr. Garber, who has taken a position as Provost at Harvard University, and

to strengthen the integration and coordination of Center investigators. Dr. Owens will replace Dr. Garber, and Dr. Wagner will serve as the co-Associate Director, replacing Dr. Timko. We also will be examining, and revising where needed, the organizational process by which tasks are accomplished.