



Pittsburgh

Center of Excellence

Director: Michael J. Fine, MD, MSc

Executive Summary for Fiscal Year 2011

The Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion (CHERP) at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) and Philadelphia VA Medical Center (PVAMC) continues to advance our mission to promote equity and quality in health and health care among Veterans. FY11 was highly productive in many areas, including faculty recruitment, new research awards, and successful dissemination of CHERP research. We also took advantage of new opportunities to directly communicate the impact of our research to top-level VA administrative leaders. These interactions included a series of invited lectures organized by Dr. Asch and presentation of recommendations from the VA Health Equality Workgroup, co-chaired by Dr. Fine, on how to improve health equality in the VA.

In preparation for the upcoming Centers of Innovation (COIN) program, we strengthened existing partnerships and forged new collaborations with clinical and operations partners to maximize the impact of our research. For example, in FY11, we partnered with the VISN4 Chief Medical Officer to evaluate a new electronic consultation (e-consult) initiative to enhance access to specialty care for providers and patients at rural Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) and Medical Centers in VISN4. Our initial evaluation focused on assessing provider and patient satisfaction with the e-consult process and identifying facilitators of and barriers to e-consult utilization. In FY12, the evaluation will extend to assessment of other measures such as safety and clinical outcomes. CHERP's contribution to this work will provide VISN4 leadership with critical insights regarding this innovative approach to enhancing specialty care access for Veterans.

We also established a new partnership with the national Veterans Engineering Resource Center (VERC) based at VAPHS, one of four national centers charged with applying the principles of systems engineering to facilitate innovative solutions to health system challenges. This partnership supports our ability to conduct research that is relevant to multiple VA stakeholders and provides a strong foundation for the implementation of evidence-based interventions to improve the quality and equity of VA health care. In FY11, we collaborated on two projects aligned with VA's Transformation Initiative (T21). The T21 project led by Dr. Hall provided the foundation for his conditionally approved HSR&D Service Directed Project on Research Best Practices. CHERP investigators and VERC staff will use an innovative combination of systems engineering, qualitative, and quantitative methods to map and analyze processes at 10 VA Institutional Review Boards to identify barriers to quality and efficiency in review processes and best practices to overcome these barriers. In addition to contributing to the development of this proposal, VERC has committed substantial in-kind support for the proposed work. Dr. Hausmann's T21 collaborative project with VERC is focused on identifying and remediating the barriers to complete and accurate demographic data collection for Veterans receiving VA health care. The VHA Health Equality Workgroup and VA senior leaders endorsed the importance of complete and accurate demographic data to document VA's progress in achieving equity in health care delivery and outcomes.