

Development of the Research Network

The integration of research into community-based hospitals and homes for the aged within the System was seen as providing several advantages, including but not limited to the following:

- Academic research centres need the involvement of the community in order to develop meaningful research programs that can apply to the entire health care system.
- Academically based research programs, when blended with high standards of patient/resident care, offers value-added services and complements the community.
- Research methodologies, when consistent with the principles of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), offer the highest level of critical evaluation in health care. Evaluation outcome measurement is most effective through applying relevant research methodologies.

Activities towards establishing a system-wide research agenda began in the spring of 1995. During this period a review of research priorities and clinical practices was conducted in each of the facilities that comprise the St. Joseph's Health System. The review identified aging as a unifying research interest for all the facilities. In addition, developing research skills within the participating facilities was viewed as a priority. Funding for this initiative was provided by the facilities to recruit and hire four researchers (the Director and three Senior Research Associates).

Organizational Structure

The St. Joseph's Health System Research Network is affiliated with the Father Sean O'Sullivan Research Center (FSORC). Network research activities are linked to other related programs of FSORC. The network uses a multi-disciplinary framework to develop research initiatives, and identify or respond to educational needs within the System's facilities.

Senior Research Associates are accountable to the Director who oversees activities to promote and develop the Network. The Director and Senior Research Associates are responsible for mounting and coordinating targeted research projects within the member facilities. A project assistant provides administrative and secretarial support for the Network researchers.

In 1996, research resource centres were opened in four system facilities as the base of operations for Network activities. Research interest groups typically meet on a monthly basis to discuss new and continuing research projects, and opportunities to conduct multi-site research in two or more System facilities. Committee membership is drawn from across the facility.

A Research Network Advisory Committee with executive representation from each of the member facilities, and the Directors of FSORC and the St. Joseph's Health System was developed to facilitate the network activities. The Advisory Committee is an integral part of the processes that enables the Network to carry out daily operations and to develop research agendas in each of the member facilities. It supports the Network by providing advice on Network activities, reviewing reports, periodically evaluating the Network's performance, and assisting to raise awareness of the Network's activities in each of the facilities and their

host communities. Committee members' advice, guidance and participation is sought at both an individual and collective level.

Father Sean O'Sullivan Research Centre

The St. Joseph's Health System (SJHS) Research Network represents a program of the Father Sean O'Sullivan Research Centre (FSORC) that brings research expertise and opportunities across the system facilities. FSORC has supported the Research Network by facilitating research opportunities and strengthening collaborative linkages among researchers affiliated with FSORC and the Faculty of Health Sciences, McMaster University.

Benefits of the SJHS Research Network to the System

The development of the Research Network reflects the SJHS Mission, by promoting cohesion and collaboration in all aspects of health care among the System partners. Benefits of the Research Network to the SJHS include: informed decision-making; service integration; and community collaboration with academic Health Sciences Centres.

Informed decision-making

As the demands for cost-effective health care delivery and professional accountability increase, research-based practice is both a priority and necessity for health care professionals. Research projects and utilization activities are essential for the advancement of evidence-based practice. The importance of basing health care practice, education, and management on research findings has been discussed and promoted by physicians for many years.

The System benefits from a number of activities promoting informed decision-making. For example, a joint effort by the Department of Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, McMaster University, and the FSORC resulted in the United States Government Agency for Health Care Policy Research designating FSORC as an Evidence-Based Practice Center. Therefore FSORC will be eligible for contract funding from the U.S. Government to develop treatment guidelines.

Service Integration

Canada is involved in large-scale efforts to integrate human services on federal, provincial and local levels for two key reasons. First, there is a concern that increasing fragmentation of services makes access difficult and stable support for service agencies uncertain. Second, service integration is viewed as a way to both reduce health costs and improve efficiency in service delivery. The System is a natural outgrowth of a 130-year-old healing tradition of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton. It represents the current trend towards service integration. As a single corporation, the SJHS is one of the largest single corporations in Canada devoted to health providing services under the guidance of a health care system with a common mission, vision and values. Today the system has more than 5000 employees and a combined operating budget of over 275 million dollars per year.

The Research Network has helped further the integrate the System by providing increased capability and innovation. The Network has also extended complex services throughout the System and offered new venues for communication within the System.

Community Collaboration with Academic Health Science Centres

Through patient care, research and education programs, Academic Health Science Centres (AHSCs), such as the McMaster Faculty of Health Sciences, make a vital contribution to the people of Ontario. It is widely agreed that as publicly funded institutions within Canada's health care system, AHSCs activities should be more closely linked to their host communities. A variety of initiatives have explored ways to develop new relationships between AHSCs and the communities they serve. In the Central West Ontario region, the McMaster Faculty of Health Sciences Center is conducting several projects to promote community partnerships and interdisciplinary collaboration. The McMaster University Health of the Public Project (HOPP), one of 33 project sites in North America, is a prime example. Goals of the program include supporting population-based health promotion, encouraging demand-side planning in education and research, and recognizing that AHSCs should be both responsive and responsible to the communities they serve. Supported by two U.S. foundations, activities among HOPP members have included curriculum development in population-based health promotion; community collaboration; and developing and evaluating interdisciplinary health programs.

The Research Network shares several mutual goals with HOPP. By its affiliation with the McMaster Faculty of Health Sciences, the Research Network interacts with researchers from other departments and schools within the University. Through successfully providing linkages, contacts and access to information the Research Network has proved instrumental in disseminating health information, promoting quality health research and providing effective communication between the University, and the System.

Directions of the Research Network

The Network is embedded within a community of research networks. Therefore its success depends on developing high levels of cooperation, trust, and reciprocity within this community. As a result, a key goal of the Network includes a commitment to strengthening its relationship with other research networks, thereby promoting integration within a larger research community. Developing co-operative ventures with other researchers will reinforce this and can, in turn promote both excellence within the Research Network and an enhanced research culture within the SJHS.

Program of Research

The Network is committed to developing research initiatives involving care for elderly across the health continuum. The research program examines the relationship of health and social services for the older adult and their family caregivers in terms of their organization, accessibility, and process of care. The emphasis is on quality of life outcomes of older adults and their family caregivers. A key feature of the research program is to translate evidence into practice through active partnerships with both the facilities in the System and the broader community of Central West Ontario.

Themes & Objectives

The Network's program of research focuses on three key areas of service delivery- acute, community, and long-term care. Within these areas of service delivery, research themes include screening and assessment, health prevention, health promotion, treatment, support, and education.

Program objectives include:

- Evaluate existing and new interventions designed to support older adults and their family caregivers in ways that will assist them to make decisions related to service, policy and strategic planning
- Conduct primary research studies in health care delivery.
- Identify key areas for further research from practice and community settings.
- Develop strategies to disseminate research findings and methodological tools useful to decision makers for improving the performance of services. Develop collaborative linkages between researchers in the Faculty of Health Science, McMaster University and the facilities in the SJHS and the broader communities in Central West Ontario to promote the integration of education, research and service within health service delivery.