



The RAPP Sheet

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Network Study of Family Practice To Be Featured in *JFP*

The Network Study of Family Practice, the landmark study of the content of patient visits to 138 RAPP clinicians, will be featured in a special theme issue of *The Journal of Family Practice*. The journal will be published in May, 1998 and, depending on the availability of space, will include up to fourteen articles based on Network Study results.

All papers in the theme issue were reviewed by RAPP physicians and written by members of the study team. According to *Journal* editor Paul Nutting, MD, MSPH, Director of the Ambulatory Sentinel Practice Network, "The members of RAPP have conducted a remarkable study that will have profound effects on both future primary care practice and research. I expect that our May issue will be one of the most important publications in family practice in this decade."

Kurt Stange, MD, PhD, principal investigator of the Network Study adds, "This theme issue allows us to showcase the value of family practice. It is a tribute to the practices who participated, and to their patients."

The Network Study, also known as the Direct Observation of Primary Care Study, examined the content and context of care provided to 4,454 patients in RAPP practices. By using multiple viewpoints, including direct

observation, medical record review, patient and physician questionnaires and billing data, the study generated a wealth of information about family practice. As a result, the theme issue of the *Journal* will include papers on a wide range of topics. They include:

"The Value of a Family Physician"

"Understanding Primary Care Practice: A Complexity Model of Change"

"Illuminating the Black Box: A Description of 4454 Patient Visits to 138 Family Physicians in 84 Practices"

"The Family in Family Practice: Is it a Reality? Results of a Multi-Faceted Study"

"Trade-Offs in High Volume Primary Care Practice"

"Primary Care Practice Organization: A Qualitative Analysis"

"Billing for Physician Services: A Comparison of Actual Billing with CPT Codes Assigned by Direct Observation"

"Patient Satisfaction with Time Spent with Them by Their Family Physician"

"The Effect of a Secondary Patient on the Family Practice Visit"

"The Impact of Recent Emotional Distress and Diagnosis of Depression or Anxiety on the Physician-Patient"

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STEP-UP Is In The Field

Data collection is under way for STEP-UP, the Study To Enhance Prevention by Understanding Practice. STEP-UP is based on findings from the Network Study of Family Practice which indicated that, despite widespread interest in prevention, the actual rate of preventive service delivery is low.

Eighty RAPP practices are participating in the new study. This means that Northeast Ohio family physicians are once again taking part in practice-based research that will have important national implications.

A Tailored Approach to Prevention

STEP-UP helps each participating practice develop a tailored plan for delivering preventive services. The process begins with a visit from a research nurse who samples medical records and mails a brief questionnaire to a sample of patients. These data are used to generate baseline information on preventive service delivery rates. In subsequent visits, the research nurses monitor changes in prevention rates and procedures.

Following the initial visit of the research nurse, practices are visited by a nurse facilitator. The facilitator gets to know how the practice functions and

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Meet The Research Nurses!



STEP-UP Research Nurses (left to right) Nancy Konrad, Sharon Weyer and Diane Esola

The process of understanding practice is central to STEP-UP, and that process begins with a visit from one of our three research nurses. The research nurses bring a wealth of experience to the STEP-UP project; we are proud to introduce you to them here:

Diane Esola: Diane is a 1978 graduate of the Akron City Hospital Idabelle Firestone School of Nursing. An employee of Summa Health Center in Akron since 1989, she has worked in family practice and has taken part in the facility's clinical research activities. Previously, she worked for nine years at Robinson Memorial Hospital in Ravenna, where she gained experience in almost every hospital department and was instrumental in the development of Robinson's same-day surgery unit. Diane appreciates the innovations and unique perspectives that she sees in RAPP practices.

Nancy Konrad: Nancy has extensive experience in the inpatient setting and is excited about the opportunity to work in family practice. Her past experience has been primarily in pediatrics, as well as coronary care, intensive care, newborn nursery and postpartum care. She has conducted chart reviews for

research studies and has a personal interest in improving the quality of life through increasing preventive services. Nancy is a graduate of the Jackson Memorial Hospital nursing program in Miami, FL; she received a bachelor's degree in Human Services from Baldwin Wallace College in 1996.

Sharon Weyer: Sharon has worked at Wadsworth Rittman Hospital for eighteen years in areas including obstetrics, surgery, special care and post-anesthesia care. She has also worked as a professional Medical Audit Consultant and helped conduct studies for Summa Health System, Children's Hospital Medical Center of Akron and Cleveland Clinic's Venture's Home Health Care. She received her RN from the Aultman Hospital School of Nursing and is currently completing her BSN. Sharon believes that prevention is the most important health care we can provide. ❖

Network Study Featured

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Encounter in Family Practice"

*"Physician Employment Status and
Patterns of Care"*

*"Opportunistic Preventive Service
Delivery: Are Time and Patient
Satisfaction Barriers?"*

*"Smoking Status Ascertainment and
Cessation Counseling"*

More than 40 other papers based on study results are currently being planned or written. They will be submitted to journals for publication during the next several years. ❖

STEP-UP In Field

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conducts a meeting to help the practice develop its intervention plan. Working with the facilitator, the practice selects prevention approaches and materials from a menu of options. The menu of approaches to enhancing prevention is based on findings from the Network Study of Family Practice and on strategies proven to be effective in other studies.

Study Is In The Field

The 80 participating practices have been randomized into two groups. Practices in the initial intervention group have received preliminary visits from the research nurses and are holding practice meetings with the nurse facilitators. Practices randomized to the delayed intervention, which initially serves as a comparison group, will receive the intervention in about one year.

STEP-UP's Impact

STEP-UP helps family practices assess their current approaches to prevention and implement enhancement strategies that are likely to work in each practice's unique setting. Rates of delivery of preventive services will be compared between the two groups of practices and changes in preventive service delivery over time will be assessed. Like the Network Study of Family Practice, STEP-UP's impact will ultimately go well beyond Northeast Ohio. Findings on practice-tailored approaches to preventive service delivery are expected to be published in major medical journals and results will be disseminated to practices and policymakers around the country. ❖

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FP Researcher

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that suggestion or is that real?" he wondered. "I understand the influence of suggestion and it's very, very powerful."

That encounter led to discussions with other energy healers. Eventually, Mila Smolinski, RN, came to Dr. Blankfield's office to treat five patients with carpal tunnel syndrome using Therapeutic Touch. Motor latency measurements of the median nerve were obtained before and after each Therapeutic Touch treatment. The motor latencies averaged 6 msec prior to each treatment. After a thirty-minute session, the average motor latency was 5 msec, a 20% improvement.

Based on these preliminary findings, Dr. Blankfield, in collaboration with Linda Goetz-Fradley, RN, Cathy Sulzman, RN, and Drs. Zyzanski and Flocke, designed a randomized, placebo-controlled, single blind study in which patients will receive either Therapeutic Touch or "sham" therapeutic touch. Patients, but not investigators, will be blinded as to whether they are in the experimental or control group. Motor latency measurements of the median nerve will be obtained before and after the 20 - 30 minute Therapeutic Touch and "sham" therapeutic touch sessions. The study is being performed at MetroHealth Medical Center in Cleveland.

Regardless of the findings that result from this clinical hunch, Dr. Blankfield hopes that the study will make a contribution to research methodology. "I'm hoping that this study will establish carpal tunnel syndrome as a

model system for evaluating a whole variety of alternative therapies," he explained.

Patients interested in participating in the study can call 216-778-4269. All patients with carpal tunnel syndrome are eligible to participate, regardless of any prior treatment they have received. ❖

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Clinical Experience Inspires FP Researcher

Mark your calendar for a conference on...

Clinical Implications From The Network Study of Family Practice

Planning is under way for a CME conference which will present data and discuss clinical implications from the Network Study of Family Practice. It will be held **Saturday, September 26** at a convenient location. Please save this date!

The tentative agenda for the conference includes a series of short morning didactic sessions based on findings from the Network Study. A lunch presentation and two sets of concurrent, skill-building workshops in the afternoon will emphasize an interactive format, with opportunities for open discussion among participants. Topics are being selected for their relevance and "take-home" value for practicing clinicians.

This will be a special opportunity to learn about the impact of the Network Study, to influence the dissemination of the study findings and to help determine the direction of future RAPP research. Watch your mail for details!

For Robert Blankfield, MD, MS, family practice is fertile ground for generating new research ideas. In 1989, following his residency training, Dr. Blankfield went into private practice at Neighborhood Family Practice in Cleveland; since October, 1997, he has practiced with University Hospitals Primary Care in Berea. He pursued his interest in research by working part-time to complete a research fellowship in the Department of Family Medicine at Case Western from 1989-1992. Since then, research has been a mainstay of his practice.

Possibilities in Everyday Practice

How does a busy family physician find time to develop and implement research ideas? Simply being aware of the possibilities within everyday practice is a first step. "Things come up that seem to be worth researching," Dr. Blankfield explained. In fact, clinical experiences have been the inspiration for several of his research projects, including a new study on the effectiveness of Therapeutic Touch in treating carpal tunnel syndrome and a recent study of bilateral leg edema, completed with the help of his colleagues at Neighborhood Family Practice and MetroHealth Medical Center, with assistance from Steve Zyzanski, PhD, and Susan Flocke, PhD, of the CWRU Department of Family Medicine.

The results of the edema study are likely to provide new insights for primary care practice. "Whereas the initial clinical impression was venous insufficiency in the vast majority of cases, in fact only 10% of patients had venous insufficiency," according to Dr. Blankfield. Many patients, especially those older than age 45, had unsuspected cardiac or pulmonary conditions, despite lacking physical

signs of these disorders. Twenty percent of patients with bilateral leg edema had pulmonary hypertension without any associated cardiac problems and without clinical evidence of other lung problems such as COPD. Most of these cases of "isolated" pulmonary hypertension are probably due to sleep apnea, results which Dr. Blankfield describes as "interesting news" for clinicians.

Developing a Hunch

If looking for unanswered questions in everyday practice is a first step, then developing that question into a hypothesis comes next. For Dr. Blankfield, the process of developing a clinical hunch is a collaborative one, which begins by talking with his peers. Once he has decided that a hunch is worth pursuing, he conducts a literature search. If the topic has not been researched, he considers whether this is an opportunity to develop a project "that will advance the state of knowledge." Further development of a project includes designing the study, recruiting participants and obtaining funding.

A Unique Patient Leads to a Unique Study

Dr. Blankfield is currently beginning data collection on a study of the effectiveness of Therapeutic Touch, a form of energy healing, in treating carpal tunnel syndrome. This unique study, funded by the Ohio Academy of Family Physicians, was inspired by a patient who discussed her use of Native American energy healing techniques with Dr. Blankfield. Although intrigued by her stories, Dr. Blankfield remained skeptical of her claims of easing patient discomfort. "Is

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