

**Planting KANNED PEAs:
Developing a Sustainable Practice Enhancement Assistant (PEA) Program**

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This project had two objectives: (1) Help four rural KAN practices deliver screening mammography more efficiently, and (2) Pilot test the process of working with Practice Enhancement Assistants (PEAs) for tailored quality improvement and research.

James Mold, M.D, M.P.H and the Oklahoma Physician Resource/Research Network (OKPRN) have led the development of the practice facilitator role in practice-based research. OKPRN practice facilitators are called Practice Enhancement Assistants, or “PEAs.” KAN’s novel approach was to work with Masters in Public Health (MPH) students as their Practicum experience.

In 2005, KAN trained and immersed three second-year MPH students as PEAs in small rural Kentucky primary care practices. The students’ participation spanned six months and fulfilled their required practicum experience. KAN’s senior research nurse coordinator also served as a pioneer PEA. Our goal was to develop a program that could be sustained with new students to continue assisting community practices throughout the year. Also, the PEA role could provide an excellent learning and service opportunity for public health students.

Each PEA and her practice pursued a quality improvement (QI) project that they agreed would streamline the process of facilitating mammography delivery to patients. Each practice and PEA assessed the practice’s current mammography practices and documented delivery rates. Then, with the assistance of KAN faculty and staff, they developed a project to improve them. They customized their projects to specific office characteristics, especially methods for clinical information management, and to practice-specific goals, such as recommending screening mammography every one year versus every two years.

We learned that this approach was workable... but took a lot of work. We found that student PEAs could help practices even within a limited period of time, although more time would be beneficial. In the future, the KAN project team will better prepare both the student PEAs and the practicing physicians in order to take maximum advantage of the PEA relationship.