

The Kentucky Ambulatory Network: A New Primary Care Practice-Based Research Network in Kentucky

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Recently, 53 physicians and scientists from across Kentucky, plus special guests from Tennessee and Ohio, gathered in Lexington to organize and launch a new primary care practice-based research network: The Kentucky Ambulatory Network (KAN). KAN will be a collaborative effort involving multiple primary care physicians, the University of Kentucky, the University of Louisville, and the Kentucky Academy of Family Physicians. Its members will represent many organizations; for example: the Kentucky Primary Care Association, the Center for Rural Health, and all of the Family Practice Residency programs in the state.

Based on the experience of physicians in other practice-based networks, KAN members can expect to reap multiple benefits through their participation; including intellectual stimulation, acquisition of new knowledge through original research, improved patient care that results from these activities, and sharing the excitement of discovery.

The aim of these physicians and researchers is to create a network of practicing physicians who will conduct research that is highly pertinent and directly applicable to primary care practices and their patients. Most medical research is conducted at large tertiary care centers, involving patients with health problems that are unusual or severe enough to warrant referral to special facilities. This raises concerns among primary care practitioners that a significant portion of research findings may not apply very well to their patients and their practices. The goal of this new primary care practice-based research network is to study common health problems, with respect to their prevention, diagnosis and treatment, in the settings where most people get most of their health care, most of the time.

Among the KAN conference attendees were John Patterson, M.D., MSPH, President of the Kentucky Academy of Family Physicians, and Michael Hartsell, M.D., President Elect of the Tennessee Academy of Family Physicians. The level of interest and participation from all those present was very high and very effective. Major topics of interest were ideas for studies that the members may want to pursue, and the desire to get as many primary care physicians involved with KAN as possible.

Anyone desiring information about KAN is encouraged to contact Kevin Pearce, M.D. or his assistant, Melissa Isenhoff. Contact information is provided at the end of this article. To date, KAN has over 100 members, and is still growing.

The conference began with a keynote address by Kurt Stange, M.D., PhD, Professor of Family Medicine, Epidemiology, Biostatistics, Sociology, and Oncology at Case Western Reserve University. Dr. Stange is a family physician who organized a practice-based research network (PBRN) in Northeastern Ohio that has produced significant research

findings for family physicians. He presented a history of some of the successes of PBRN's across the country, giving multiple examples of important research results that are of direct importance and applicability to primary care practitioners.

Dr. Hartsell also has extensive experience with PBRNs. From his private practice in Eastern Tennessee, he has participated for the past 15 years in multiple studies as a member of the Ambulatory Sentinel Practice Network (ASPN). (ASPN was recently reconstituted under the auspices of the American Academy of Family Physicians into the National Network for Family Practice and Primary Care Research.) During an entertaining and inspiring dinner presentation, Dr. Hartsell described the various levels of involvement and commitment possible in this type of activity. He pointed out that significant contributions can be made with as little as 10 minutes per week of the physician's time.

Those who attended the one day conference helped formulate the basic organizational structure for KAN, and discussed a lot of excellent ideas for research studies. During its first three years of existence, administrative costs for KAN will be partially funded through a grant awarded to the UK Department of Family Practice from the U.S. Public Health Service (Health Resources and Services Administration). Experts in clinical research, health services research, and biostatistics will assist the member physicians with each study that they decide to pursue. KAN will have a Governing Advisory Council composed of private practitioners, representatives from residency programs, a representative from the KAFP, a representative from the Center for Rural Health, and representatives from UK and U of L. In order to achieve sustainability, KAN will pursue further financial support in the future from grants and contracts.

To define the nature of the KAN practices and the patients for whom they provide care, the first study will be a replication of the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey. For this observational study of practice content, each member physician will record anonymous data about his or her patient-visits for a period of one or two weeks. This information, when combined with data from all KAN practices, will paint an accurate picture of the types of patient problems, diagnoses, treatments, and preventive services and counseling provided by these practices. The KAN members decided that they would like to simultaneously record information on clinical problems of special interest to them that were not included in the original NAMCS. These included chronic pain, anxiety, depression, and obesity. The KAN NAMCS-Plus study is being piloted now, and KAN hopes to complete it by the spring of next year.

The conference attendees spent a good deal of time brainstorming and discussing other ideas for future studies.

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Various workgroups within the network will be looking at these ideas and helping develop some of them further. Another issue of high priority was recruiting more primary care physicians into the Network. Membership will not carry an obligation to participate in every study.

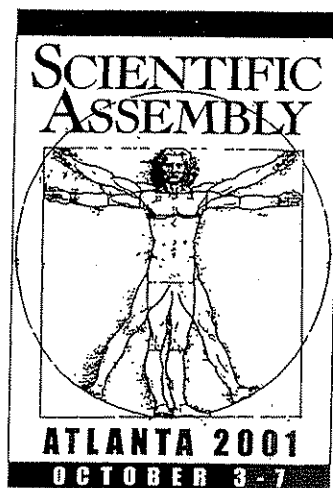
The Kentucky Ambulatory Network is part of a larger national effort fostering research that focuses upon physicians and patients in the settings where most medical care occurs. The American Academy of Family Physicians has made practice-based research a high priority. They have plans to support its development through grants and through the AAFP Center for Policy Studies in Family Practice and Primary Care. Efforts by the AAFP and others have resulted in a growing amount of competitive grant funding for primary care being offered by agencies of the U.S. Public Health Service. Much of this may be directed toward research that is highly pertinent to actual practice.

To learn more about the Kentucky Ambulatory Network, please contact Kevin A. Pearce, M.D., MPH, Network Director, or Melissa Isenhoff, Staff Assistant, at (859) 323-3592 or kpearce@pop.uky.edu, or mlisen2@pop.uky.edu.

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Mark A. Tackett, M.D., District 3, is an active member practicing in Madisonville. He transferred from Anderson, South Carolina where he completed his residency program.

Carol P. Worrill, D.O., District 4, is an active member practicing in Elizabethtown. Dr. Worrill transferred from the Uniformed Services Chapter.

Gary W. Davis, M.D., District 5, is an active member practicing in Louisville and living in Jeffersonville, Indiana.

Allen J. McBride, M.D., District 5, is an active member transferring from the Michigan Chapter. He serves as Medical Director for Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield. Dr. McBride and his wife Toni M. Cutson, M.D., live in Louisville.

William C. Thornbury, M.D., District 6, is an active member practicing in Glasgow. Dr. Thornbury completed his general surgery residency in 1997 and his family practice residency in 1999.

Robert G. Wellman, M.D., District 6, a supporting member specializing in psychiatry, transferred from the Uniformed Services Chapter. Dr. Wellman and his wife Lydia live in Glasgow where he serves as a family practice residency instructor.

Maria F. Burton, M.D., District 8, is an active member practicing in Edgewood. She transferred from the Indiana Chapter and lives in Elsmere.

Varsha Chandramouli, M.D., District 8, is a resident at the University of Cincinnati, transferring from the West Virginia Chapter. He and his wife Karthik live in Florence.

Marguerite Schabell, M.D., District 8, is an active member transferring from the Indiana Chapter and a former KAFP member. Dr. Schabell practices in Florence. She and her husband Robert live in Edgewood.

Robert Biddle, M.D., District 9, is an active member and former Academy member returning from Montana. He practices in Paris and lives in Cynthiana.

Victor H. Bell, M.D., District 12, is an active member and former Academy member practicing in Lancaster. He lives in Danville.

Jerry W. Lawson, M.D., District 12, is an active member practicing in Jamestown. He lives in Russell Springs.

William J. Short, M.D., District 13, is an active member practicing in Ashland and a former Academy member.

Paul J. Allencherrill, M.D., District 14, is a supporting member specializing in internal medicine. He is practicing in Hazard.

James A. Chaney, M.D., District 14, is a supporting member specializing in emergency medicine. He practices in Hazard.

Paul Cooney, D.O., District 15, is a resident member in the UK/Corbin program, transferring from the Oklahoma Chapter. He and his wife Jennifer live in Corbin.