

**Houston Endowment  
Second Year Grant Report  
February 28, 2007**

**Organization Name:** The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, School of Public Health

**Reference No.:** 04-0446

**Grant Start Date:** 3/31/2005

**Total Amount of Grant:** \$485,000

**Purpose:** Establish the Houston Health Services Research Collaborative for documenting public health issues and evaluating policy initiatives that impact the greater Houston area and its medically underserved populations.

**Report due date:** February 28, 2007

**Grant funds received:** \$319,000.00 (\$157,000 year one, \$162,000 year two)

**Grant funds expended:** \$277,240.95

**Total project cost:** \$485,000

**Date project to be completed:** March 31, 2008

## **I. SECOND YEAR ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

As indicated in the first year report, the three-year goal of the Collaborative is to create a sustainable program of high quality health services research focusing on issues in Harris County that affect underserved populations. Specific objectives are:

- 1) Organize research teams to conduct existing projects identified by the community, develop new project ideas, and seek research funding.
- 2) Develop and maintain databases that can be used by the community to monitor health problems and health service performance.
- 3) Provide technical assistance to the community in health services research, planning, and program evaluation.

During the second year of the project, there were some changes to the coordinating staff of students and faculty at the University of Texas School of Public Health (UTSPH);<sup>1</sup> a

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<sup>1</sup> UTSPH Coordinating Staff: Project Director, Charles Begley; Project Coordinator, Patrick Courtney; Data Coordinator, Munseok Seo; Research Faculty, Michael Swint, Luisa Franzini; Student Researchers, Frances Lee, Gul Nowshad, Patrice Williams, Carlos Ramos, Thien Vu.



website, letterhead and other administrative capacity were developed; monthly meetings were conducted with representatives of academic, medical, and public institutions to promote the agenda and seek guidance for project activities; working groups were formed in several research areas; activity was completed by research teams on three existing projects; and five new project proposals were developed. Specific accomplishments are summarized below

### **A. Completed Projects**

#### Juvenile Offenders and Mental Health

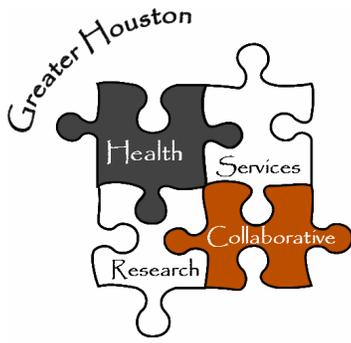
*Scott Hickey, MHMRA of Harris County, Texas, Pam Boveland, Diana Quintana, Matthew Shelton, Harris County Juvenile Probation Department, William Schnapp, University of Texas Mental Sciences Institute, Keith Burau, Charles Begley, UT School of Public Health Rebecca DaCamera, Mental Health Association of Greater Houston, Philip Emmite, Houston Independent School District*

The purpose of this project was to describe to what degree the public mental health and juvenile justice systems serve the same children and adolescents. The goals of the project were: 1) Understanding the system entry points taken en route to mental health treatment; 2) Documenting the mental health needs of juvenile offenders; 3) Describing the nature of juvenile offenses committed by adolescents with mental disorders; 4) Exploring the relationship of mental disorder to juvenile justice recidivism; and 5) Use this data as a pilot or demonstration study to serve as a basis for securing outside research funding. Results were presented at the National Conference on Mental Health Statistics and the Houston Safety Net Conference.

#### Community Behavioral Health Program Evaluation

*Charles Begley, Thien Vu, UT School of Public Health, Scott Hickey, Harris County Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority, Britta Ostermeyer, Mark Kunik, Baylor College of Medicine, Ann Teske, Harris County Hospital District, Julia Wolf, The Council on Alcohol & Drugs Houston*

The primary objectives of this project were to: 1) Describe the major resources and features of the CBHP program that were implemented; 2) Describe the services provided and the characteristics of patients served; and 3) Determine whether there has been a positive impact on access, health, provider satisfaction, and costs. A secondary objective was to describe program areas in need of improvement and to develop recommendations



for a more complete evaluation of the program in the future. The evaluation study was completed and a report submitted to the funding source. A paper is being developed and further research ideas are being explored. The CBHP program, as well as this evaluation, were both presented at the February 9, 2007 conference. The report of the evaluation has been posted on the Collaborative website.

#### Harris County Emergency Department Use Study

*Charles Begley, Patrick Courtney, Keith Bureau, UT School of Public Health*

Funding was obtained from 25 Houston hospitals (an increase of 9 over the 2004 ED study) to obtain and analyze 2005 ED visit data. The study involves applying the NYU ED Algorithm to the visit data to monitor primary care related ER use as an indicator of access problems in the community. The 2005 report is being prepared and will be presented to the participating hospitals on March 1, and then shared with various planning groups in the community.

A summary report of 2004 hospital ER visit data was published in Houston Department of Health and Human Services, *The State of Health in Houston/Harris County*, January 2007. Several additional analyses were completed during the year for various community groups using data from last year's study.

#### Houston/Galveston Area Trauma/EMS Policy Council Data Project

*Charles Begley, Munseok Seo, UT School of Public Health, for the Data Committee*

The H-GAC Emergency/Trauma Care Policy Council was created 2003 with members from 13 H/GAC counties in southeast Texas including: emergency physicians, trauma surgeons, hospital administrators, EMS providers and representatives from the two local trauma regional advisory councils. The mission of the Council is to: develop plans and policies for improving regional emergency/trauma care, and create system for monitoring regional performance. A data committee was charged to develop monitoring system. The HHSRC is supporting this effort

We have obtained data from the Texas Health Care Information Collection (THCIC), EMSsystem, and the Texas Trauma Registry. The data are being used to monitor performance of the regional trauma system and conduct special studies. A report was prepared for the council and two new studies were begun.



The Effects of Financial and Insurance Considerations on Health Care Utilization Decisions

*Pamela Behan, University of Houston-Downtown, Patrice Williams, University of Texas School of Public Health*

This project seeks to clarify the specific processes by which health care utilization decisions are made and the ways in which they are affected by financial and insurance considerations in order to better guide public policy. A survey of 500 randomly selected Harris County residents is being completed by telephone using random digit dialing and computer assisted technology at the University of Houston's Center for Public Policy. A presentation about the project and its early results was presented at the February 9, 2007 conference.

**B. On-going Projects**

Preventable Hospitalization and Local Capacity for Primary Care Services in the Greater Houston Area

*Frances Lee, Michael Swint, University of Texas School of Public Health*

The purpose of the study is to: 1) investigate the rate of preventable hospitalizations by insurance type in Harris County; 2) the association between the capacity of primary care services and preventable hospitalizations for the low-income population; and 3) the association between the proximity to the nearest primary care services and preventable hospitalizations for the low-income population. The project uses data from Project Safety Net, Census Bureau, and the Texas Health Care Information Collection for 2004. The study proposals have been developed and the data have been obtained.

A preliminary analysis of hospital discharge data acquired by the Harris County Hospital District was completed and a report published in Houston Department of Health and Human Services, *The State of Health in Houston/Harris County*, January 2007.



### Evaluation of the Harris County Hospital District Ask Your Nurse” Hot Line

*Dean Johnson, Charles Begley, University of Texas School of Public Health*

The purpose of this study is to determine if the nurse advice line (NAL) at the Lyndon B Johnson Hospital has reduced ER visits by diverting Harris County Hospital District (HCHD) gold card holders with non-emergent complaints away from the ED to a primary care facility or home care. The results of this study will be used to argue for or against the continuation of this initiative as part of the solution to the ER overcrowding problem in Harris County. Data have been obtained and preliminary analysis has been completed.

### Katrina Evacuee Follow-up Study

*Sondip Mathur, Texas Southern University, Nancy Weller, Baylor College of Medicine, Kentya Ford, MD Anderson Cancer Center, Charles Begley, Patrice Williams, University of Texas School of Public Health*

The goal of this study is to examine the health care utilization decisionmaking and health care use patterns of Hurricane Katrina evacuees enrolled in the HCHD system in order to determine if the evacuees’ medical care access needs are being met. The proposal was funded by TSU in January 2006 and the team is obtaining approval from the appropriate Institutional Review Boards in order to carry out the study. The researchers will obtain the HCHD medical records for 2005-06 of Katrina evacuees and a matched sample of non-Katrina patients who are regular users of the HCHD system and document their actual health care utilization patterns. They will compare the utilization patterns of both groups and the factors associated with variations in use. They will survey a sample of the HCHD Katrina evacuees and matched non-Katrina patients to determine the factors that influence their health care seeking behavior. They will compare the health care decision-making in both groups and the variations in influencing factors.

## **.C. New Projects**

### Gateway to Care Navigator Evaluation Study

*Carlos Ramos, Charles Begley, University of Texas School of Public Health*

Gateway to Care Navigation Services provides peer-to-peer advisors who assist clients in the greater Harris County area in coordinating their needs with available safety net



resources. Gateway to Care and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) have designed a program to provide CHIP clients with access to navigators. The purpose of this project is to evaluate the impact of this program on patterns of care and costs. The evaluation hypothesis is that by educating clients about the importance of identifying and using a permanent health home, and assisting them in obtaining needed social services and developing a family preventative healthcare plan, navigator services lead to greater use of preventive and primary care, reduced use of emergency room and hospital inpatient care, and reduced costs. The evaluation will determine if the use of navigators by CHIP clients improves their pattern of service use and saves program costs. Collaborative researchers will work with the CHIP plans to obtain the billing data for clients over the study period.

The proposal has been approved by Gateway to Care and HHSC and preliminary analyses are being conducted to determine the optimal data collection procedures.

#### Effects of Ambulance Diversion on Pediatric Hospital Care

*Rohit Sheno, Long Ma, Jennifer Jones, Texas Children's Hospital, Charles Begley, Munseok Seo, University of Texas School of Public Health*

This study seeks to find out if pediatric patient outcomes suffer during times of ED overcrowding in pediatric hospitals. A review of retrospective de-identified hospital discharge data and ambulance diversion data will be undertaken. The ED diversion and hospital discharge data will be combined into a single database covering the study period. A correlation analysis of the relation between diversion and mortality and morbidity will be conducted.

#### Assessment of Primary Care for the Uninsured

*Charles Begley, Patrick Courtney, University of Texas School of Public Health, Jennifer Rankin, St. Luke's Episcopal Health Charities*

This study represents the first attempt to systematically assess the magnitude of the gap between supply and demand of primary care in Harris County for the low income uninsured. Based on an agreement with St. Luke's Episcopal Health Charities, data from clinics that are affiliated with their Project Safety Net was obtained. This was matched with data that was already on hand (from another joint UTSPH-SLEHC project) of estimated number of uninsured persons at the zip code level and their demand for primary care. For the purposes of planning and focus, Harris County was divided into four



quadrants (based on zip codes). One analysis was completed showing that the northeast quadrant of Harris County is the area in greatest need for safety net primary care expansion. The Health Services Research Collaborative continues to work with the aforementioned groups on this study. A slide show about this process is posted on the Collaborative website, and a slightly different version of this slide show was presented at the February 9, 2007 conference.

#### **D. Conference on February 9, 2007**

One of our major activities of the past year was our conference on February 9, 2007. Entitled “Health Care Safety Net Initiatives: Policy and Performance,” it was a day long event that brought together researchers, direct service providers, policy makers, community leaders, etc. In keeping with the focus of our Endowment funded project, the primary focus was on data and efforts in the greater Houston area. However, as part of that process, keynote speakers and experts from around the nation were brought in. Over one hundred people attended.

Morning sessions were as follows:

- Cross-community perspectives on health care safety net models
- Measuring performance of health care safety nets
- Austin initiatives in safety net care
- San Antonio initiatives in safety net care
- Integrating public health and safety net care

Afternoon breakout sessions included presentations on both policy initiatives and research/evaluation on the following areas:

- Coverage expansion
- Primary care improvement
- Behavioral health initiatives
- EMS/trauma strategies

Collaborative faculty, staff, and students met regularly to plan for the conference, and assisted in registration and in conducting the afternoon sessions. Upon morning arrival, participants received a folder that included information about many safety net providers in the area. It was reported that persons from The Houston Endowment and the office of a state legislator were in attendance at the conference. Collaborative staff have received inquiries since the conference about how some of the information presented can be used to assist them in their work. Powerpoint slide shows for most of the presentations are now posted on the Collaborative website.



## **E. Newsletter**

An occasional newsletter was first designed and distributed electronically in fall of 2006. All of the projects with the Collaborative were mentioned, and two in particular were mentioned in detail. A few print copies were distributed as well. The newsletter is posted on the Collaborative website.

## **F. Other Activities**

### 1. Website (<http://www.sph.uth.tmc.edu/hsrc>)

Our website continues to be a means by which information about the Collaborative is made public. In the last year, it has been revised (partly in keeping with UTSPH requirements about website design) and expanded. The two most notable additions to the website are a) Reports and Publications of project activities, and b) an Events section where slide shows from the February 9 conference are posted. While not technical assistance in the narrow sense, there is also a section with links to various common use publications that relate to the health care safety net (e.g. the uninsured in Texas, Medicaid and CHIP, the state of health in Houston and Harris County, etc.).

### 2. Technical assistance to Project Safety Net

Based on our experience of working with the outpatient project mentioned above, we are working with members of Project Safety Net in revising their next annual survey of their clinics.

## **II. UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES OR DIFFICULTIES**

Last year's annual report to The Houston Endowment mentioned that we realized the difficulty of working on a regular basis with a large group of community leaders who wanted to be involved. A solution to this was to limit our regular meetings to the researchers, analysts, and students who are actually working on the projects, and to meet with a larger advisory committee less frequently to gain their feedback and expertise. The first meeting of the advisory committee was on December 15, 2006.



The development of our projects has taken longer than expected and required more paperwork and effort obtaining institutional approvals from several entities. It has also been difficult and time consuming to obtain the public use data files from the state.

### **III. PROJECT BENEFITS**

#### **Research support for local planning groups**

Harris County Healthcare Alliance –Dr. Begley serves as an alternate representative for the University of Texas Health Science Center. He and Pat Courtney attend most of the meeting of this group and have made several presentations and provided other technical assistance based on the research of the Collaborative.

H-GAC Trauma/EMS Policy Council – Dr. Begley and Munseok Seo serve on the Data Committee and have made reports to the Council on indicators of regional performance of the trauma system using the datasets that have been obtained.

Gateway to Care – Dr. Begley serves on the board of Gateway and has made several reports based on Collaborative projects.

The Behavioral Healthcare Committee of the Harris County Public Healthcare System Council, the Mental Health Needs Council, and the Behavioral Healthcare Providers Network – Several members of the Collaborative working group in behavioral health participate in these planning groups and have made reports to the groups based on their Collaborative-related projects.

Emergency Department Use Study – The aggregate report of all 25 participating hospitals will be made available to the public, as in past years. Also as in past years, each of the participating hospitals will receive a report that focuses only on their own data, to use as they see fit. In addition to breakdown by various patient characteristics, the aggregate and individual reports contain maps of where patients reside, so that hospitals and community groups can have a better sense (among other things) of how and where to expand outpatient capacity, where to possibly construct new facilities, etc.

Safety Net Conference - Over one hundred persons took part in our conference. Since only a small number of people present were aware of the various programs and research taking place, the conference was a chance for a large number of people from the community to find out about such efforts all at once. Since the slide shows are now posted on our website as well, an even larger number of people can now benefit.



**IV. BREAKDOWN OF GRANT EXPENDITURES:**

Budget: \$319,000.00 (\$157,000 year one, \$162,000 year two)

Expenses: \$277,240.95

Encumbrance: \$14,211.60

Balance: \$27,547.45

Budget Specifics				
	Budget	Expense	Encumbrance	Balance
Salaries and Benefits	312,800.00	271,650.22	13,860.45	27,289.33
Maintenance and Operations	3,568.00	3,123.92	351.15	92.93
Travel	850.00	842.81		7.19
Official Functions	1,782.00	1,624.00		158.00

A major factor in our expenses this past year were related to our Healthcare Safety Net Initiatives Conference on February 9, 2007. However, those expenses were offset somewhat by registration fees as well as a donation from the Kelsey Research Foundation.

**Submitted by:**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_