

NEWSLETTER *for* RURAL HEALTH CLINICS

A Newsletter for Participants in the Nationwide Rural Health Clinics Study

Doctoral Program in Public Affairs • College of Health and Public Affairs • University of Central Florida

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Preliminary Results of the Rural Health Clinics Survey

Earlier this year, the Rural Health Clinics research team at the University of Central Florida gathered and analyzed data from a survey completed by 402 RHCs nationwide as part of a comprehensive study of RHCs. The responding RHCs provided information about their structure, location and operations. The team is pleased to present some of its preliminary findings below.

> Distribution and Classification

- The regional distribution of RHCs responding to the survey (Figure 1) was comparable to the regional distribution of all RHCs nationwide (Figure 2).
- A higher proportion of *independent* RHCs responded compared to the overall number of *independent* RHCs nationwide (Table 1, p. 2).
- Although the survey responses provide valuable information about clinic structure and operations, the responses to date may not be representative of all RHCs nationwide.

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Figure 1. Regional Distribution of Responding RHCs

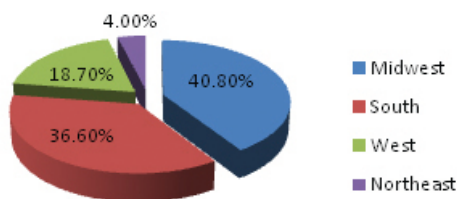
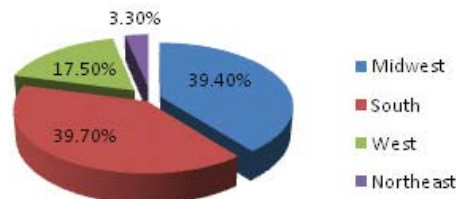


Figure 2. Regional Distribution of All RHCs Nationwide



A Message to Our Participants

From Principal Investigator Thomas T. H. Wan, Ph.D.

Thank you for your participation in our Rural Health Clinics Survey. Your responses and comments are very valuable to us in our research here in the Doctoral Program in Public Affairs at the University of Central Florida. I would like to take this opportunity to personally describe our research efforts on RHCs.

If you were to ask me to encapsulate our research in a few words, I would say “an evidence-based approach to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Rural Health Clinics.”

Our research team is analyzing the structure and function of the RHC system with great enthusiasm and gratification. We are also propelled to learn and complete more toward the

(continued on p. 3)

The Rural Health Clinics Study — A Nationwide Project

The University of Central Florida is conducting a nationwide study of Rural Health Clinics with a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

A research team (see p. 4) is analyzing the performance of RHCs by measuring their efficiency and effectiveness, with a focus on finances and use of services. Completing the study requires a comprehensive analysis of two years worth of data on approximately 3,800 RHCs, supplemented by primary data collected from the RHC survey.

Why is this study needed?

Despite the cost-based reimbursement mechanisms for qualified RHCs, many face financial challenges. These challenges are compounded by the complications of delivering medical care in geographically remote areas. In addition to meeting the health needs of patients with high rates of chronic disease, RHCs often struggle to attract and retain qualified staff. To help RHCs remain financially viable while meeting the health care needs of rural populations, it is important to understand the characteristics of the most efficient and effective RHCs.

Preliminary Results *(continued from p.1)*

Table 1. Types of RHCs That Responded

Type of RHC	Responding RHCs	All RHCs
Provider-based	33.1%	42.2%
Independent	66.9%	57.8%

> Revenue Sources

- 45.8% of responding RHCs reported receiving “more than 30% of their revenue from Medicare”
- 95.8% of responding RHCs reported receiving “less than 1% of their revenue from Fundraising”

> Participation in Integrated Systems

- 50.7% of responding RHCs reported “no participation in integrated systems”

> Use of Disease Management Programs

- 73.6% of responding RHCs reported “no existence or use of a disease management program”
- 4% of responding RHCs reported “more than 3 years of use and implementation of a disease management program”

Upcoming Research

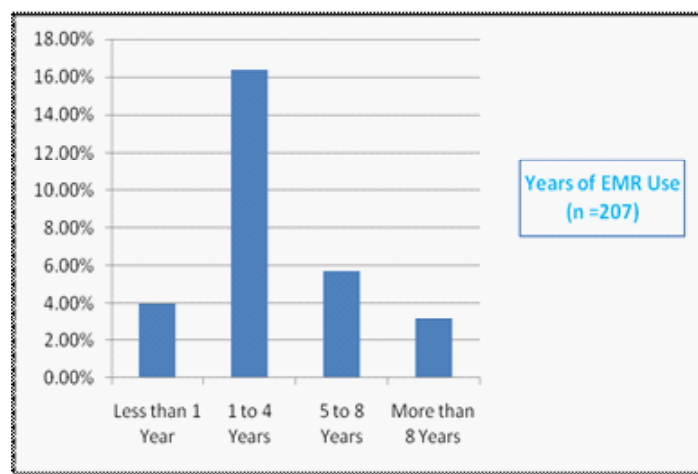
> After completing statistical analyses of the available data, the research team will conduct a focus group of RHC administrators, medical directors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners to discuss the interpretation of the results. The opinions of RHC administrators and medical directors will be incorporated into the study results.

> The research team’s findings will be shared in presentations at professional conferences, such as the National Association of Rural Health conference, and in articles in relevant professional journals.

> Use of Technology

- 62.9% of responding RHCs reported using “neither EMR nor Electronic Prescription Ordering Systems (EPOS)”
- Of those reporting use of EMR systems, most responding RHCs reported using EMR for between “1 and 4 years” (Figure 3)

Figure 3. Responding RHCs’ Years of Use of EMR Systems



Learn more

Additional information based on the survey results is forthcoming. Please feel free to contact the research team by phone or e-mail (see p. 4) to learn more.

Message *(continued from p.1)*

development of a decision-support system to optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of clinical practice in rural areas.

We began this project in August of 2008 with three researchers: Drs. Judy Ortiz and Chiung-Ya Tang and me. We made significant advances and soon needed to our expand our team to include four experienced doctoral students: Abiy Agiro, Gerald-Mark Breen, Nathani Meemon and Seung Chun Paek. The contributions from these students have elevated the quality and workability of this project, particularly with respect to data processing, management, and the overall composition and synthesis of the literature.

Our team of researchers is now well-positioned to offer insights on the available data, design of longitudinal studies and evaluation of performance indicators of RHCs throughout the United States. We have already worked extremely hard to generate preliminary research reports from our Rural Health Clinics Survey, as well as administrative data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Medicare claims files.

UCF's Health Informatics Research Lab

The RHCs research project is not free of constraints, however. The pivotal challenge we face is merging massive databases from multiple sources. Fortunately, UCF's Health Informatics Research Lab, located in the doctoral program's main building, offers exceptional capabilities. This resource has enabled us to develop a systematic master file that includes data for all RHCs nationwide (approximately 3,800 clinics). We have also built subsets of data that enable us to devise mathematical models influencing efficiency and effectiveness of rural clinics.

Your Participation is Welcome

We greatly value our collaboration with rural providers and managers. We hope you find our *Newsletter for Rural Health Clinics* informative and will use this publication to share our future research findings with you. In turn, we welcome your candid opinions and guidance that could foster productive research and collaboration in rural health. Please feel free to

contact me or any member of our research team with your thoughts. Our contact information is provided on the back page.

Again, I am grateful for your participation in our Rural Health Clinics study. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the grant support from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration. Please be advised that the opinions and statements made in this newsletter reflect only our views and do not represent the funding agency. Should you have any questions, please feel free to let us know.



Dr. Thomas T. H. Wan

Thank You

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation for your committed participation, ongoing contributions and helpful communication with our team in this important research study.

— *The Rural Health Clinics Research Team at UCF*



The Rural Health Clinics research team at UCF (left to right): Gerald-Mark Breen, Abiy Agiro, Natthani Meemon, Judy Ortiz, Thomas Wan and Seung Chun Paek

MEET THE RESEARCH TEAM

Thomas T. H. Wan, Ph.D., *principal investigator*, is professor of public affairs, health services administration and medical education at the University of Central Florida. Professor Wan joined the faculty of UCF's College of Health and Public Affairs in August 2003, and he was appointed director of the Doctoral Program in Public Affairs in June 2004. His ongoing participation in research grants, journal publications and book authoring continues to maintain his status as an outstanding member of the university community.

Judy Ortiz, Ph.D. (public affairs '02), *co-principal investigator*, is a research associate in the college as well as the department chair for health administration and an adjunct professor at Webster University in Orlando. Her industry experience spans some 20 years and includes various positions in health care, such as administrator, assistant administrator and associate contract manager. Her research interests focus on the analysis and mathematical modeling of health care performance and economics, specifically as they relate to primary care.

Abiy Agiro, M.S., is a doctoral student in public affairs (since fall 2008) with a Presidential Fellowship and graduate research assistant in the college. Previously, he studied at the graduate level in Belgium and the United Kingdom, focusing on strategic planning and statistics. He has also worked in the European Union and the Flemish regions in Belgium and at the United Nations. His current research interests focus on health services administration and strategic planning.

Contact Us

Rural Health Clinics Research Team

Doctoral Program in Public Affairs
University of Central Florida
P.O. Box 16200
Orlando, FL 32816-2200
Phone: 407-823-0170, FAX: 407-823-0744

E-mail Address

Thomas T. H. Wan – twan@mail.ucf.edu
Judy Ortiz – juortiz@mail.ucf.edu
Abiy Agiro – aagiro@mail.ucf.edu
Gerald-Mark Breen – gbreen@mail.ucf.edu
Natthani Meemon – nmeemon@mail.ucf.edu
Seung Chun Paek – spaek@mail.ucf.edu

Gerald-Mark Breen, M.A., is a doctoral student in public affairs (since fall 2007), graduate research associate and teaching associate in the college. Previously, he taught at the University of Texas from 2006-2007 and the University of Wisconsin from 2005-2006. He earned his master's degree in communications from the University of Oklahoma in 2005. He has authored or co-authored more than 40 journal articles, focusing primarily on health services, and one book with Johns Hopkins University Press.

Natthani Meemon, M.A., is a doctoral student in public affairs (since spring 2008), graduate research associate and teaching associate in the college. Previously, she studied at the graduate level in Thailand, focusing on journalism and social development, particularly in the areas of sustainable development and community participation. She was employed by the Thailand Ministry of Public Health in collaboration with the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention and served as a project coordinator to improve the quality of HIV ambulatory care and treatment. She has authored or co-authored several journal articles related to health services and ethics.

Seung Chun Paek, M.A., is a doctoral student in public affairs (since fall 2007) and a graduate research assistant in the college. He earned his master's degree in statistics at UCF in 2007. As a student, he has worked closely with Ning "Jackie" Zhang, assistant professor of public affairs, and other faculty members, contributing to statistical and quantitative studies that have led to many journal articles.