

# CRN PROJECT POSTERS

9<sup>th</sup> Annual HMO Research Network Conference

April 1-2, 2003 Denver, CO

## Information Technology

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### Using Health Plan “Meta-Data” Surveys to Facilitate Research in the Cancer Research Network

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**Background:** The Cancer Research Network (CRN) is a collaborative effort across ten health maintenance organizations funded by the National Cancer Institute with the shared mission to improve the effectiveness of cancer control interventions among diverse populations. The Data Resources Coordinating Center (DRCC) is part of the infrastructure of the CRN providing expertise and technical assistance with regards to data pooling and documentation of administrative data across member organizations. The DRCC has utilized “meta-data” surveys as a novel approach to provide organization-level information for ongoing projects and new proposals. The content and format of these meta-data surveys will be described.

**Methods:** Each meta-data survey covers a unique content area regarding population statistics, health plan organization information, components of care delivery systems and administrative aspects of health plan databases. Surveys are developed by content experts within member sites and disseminated for completion by the DRCC.

**Results:** To date, twenty-two surveys have been conducted. Surveys have covered statistics on health plan structure and member population enrollment characteristics. Surveys regarding content and organization of administrative databases for inpatient, outpatient and long term care, radiological exams, laboratory exams and pharmacy utilization have been compiled. Frequency of cancers by primary site for member organizations is also summarized in a meta-data survey. Lastly, the details regarding member organizations’ institutional review board requirements are summarized. Individual site survey responses are reported in a composite report and published on a secure website for ease of access by member researchers.

**Conclusions:** Meta-data surveys require effort and initiative of the DRCC and member organizations, but serve as a valuable resource for ongoing research and new proposal development. Publishing meta-data surveys in a user-friendly website allows for easy access, while maintaining security. This valuable resource for researchers is currently utilized more frequently by project programmers, rather than the intended audience, investigators. The acceptability of meta-data surveys as an alternative to individual person to person communication to obtain data to support developing research will continue to be monitored to discern the utility of this kind of resource.