

POSTER ABSTRACTS

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Using Discussion Mailing Lists for Communication and Information Storage on Multi-Site Research Studies

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Background: The Center for Health Studies participates in a number of collaborative research studies with other health research organizations. One of the challenges of multi-site collaborative research is the communication and discussion of study issues among study team members across all sites. Related to this is the need for an information and document store, of research study materials, that is readily accessible by all study team members.

Methods: For each of several multi-site research studies of which the Center for Health Studies (CHS) is a participant, a discussion mailing list has been created using listserv software running on a CHS web server. Listserv software can be inexpensive and straightforward to implement. A listserv-hosted discussion mailing list is a combination email and web solution. A mailing list member contributes a message to the mailing list and the listserv distributes the message to all mailing list members. The listserv also archives all mailing list messages, providing a readable and searchable message database via an easy-to-use web-based user interface.

Results: A listserv-hosted discussion mailing list effectively facilitates the discussion of research issues among study team members. When research study documents are distributed to study team members as mailing list message attachments, the listserv provides not only an effective means of message/document distribution, but also a readily accessible store of those documents. Use of a listserv is particularly effective on a long-term study and with changes to study team members – i.e. the listserv manages the email distribution list and the message/document store.

Conclusions: The use of discussion mailing lists is not only an effective solution, but also can be implemented using relatively inexpensive standard listserv software. Once implemented, additional mailing lists can be easily added and maintained.