

POSTER ABSTRACTS

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Information Technology 17

The Human Infrastructure of Information Technology at the Center for Health Studies

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Background: Since the Center for Health Studies was established in 1983 there has been a net expansion in IT staff from one to thirty-one. The purpose of this poster is to explore the growth and the organization of IT staff and its relationship to the work of the Center. CHS/IT is organized differently from IT at many of the other HMORN sites. An additional aim is that this descriptive presentation will lead to a discussion of different modes of organization in IT staff across the HMORN.

Methods: In addressing growth, I examine tenure and years of hire. Patterns of organization and areas of concentration of IT staff are examined.

Results: IT staffing has expanded relatively steadily with marked growth in 1994-1998. CHS IT staff has a diversity of backgrounds and experience. Programmers are assigned primarily to projects with overarching management of the programmers as a group and some development of subgroups. This project-centered model contrasts to a model of programmer-investigator dyads. Another organizational model is a programming pool where programmers are assigned to specific tasks rather than longer-term projects. Some form of overarching management may accompany each of these three models.

Conclusions: The Center for Health Studies IT group structure and organization has highly valued advantages in parlaying programmer knowledge within subject areas while encouraging communication among programmers. There are disadvantages to this form of organization; one being that it may be difficult to meet unanticipated staffing needs under this structure. Other structures for IT management have different strengths and weaknesses. For example, a programming pool might be better able to respond to last minute programming requests but exhibit less ability to manage long-term staffing needs. Dyads develop depth of subject-area knowledge and efficiencies based on knowing one's work partner very well. However, there may be less opportunity for exchange of ideas across groups without some overarching organization under any model, investigator-programmer dyad, project-centered, or programmer pool.