

POSTER SESSION 1 ABSTRACTS

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Using Google Documents for Collaborative Word Processing

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Much of our work involves writing documents with multiple authors having input on the document during its creation. Examples include writing grants and papers, conference abstracts, study questionnaires, and recruitment/consent materials. Our current standard for writing collaborative documents seems to be Microsoft Word. The first author keeps the master document, routes versions to coauthors for comments, and incorporates the comments. Version control quickly becomes a problem when coauthors are working on an out of date version.

By contrast, Google Documents allows multiple authors to work on the same document simultaneously, giving a very literal meaning to keeping co-authors "on the same page."

Google Documents allows true collaborative writing. Multiple authors can be modifying a document concurrently. Only if multiple authors are modifying the same piece of text will there be a warning issued. Anyone with an email address can be added as a collaborator. Google Docs can be loaded and used anywhere there is an Internet connected device with a web browser. There are no licensing fees with its use. Group Health (GH) and Kaiser Permanente (KP) collaborators tested Google Documents for the development of several HMORN Conference abstracts.

The Google Docs word processor is basic. There is no concept of master documents and secondary documents. All editors are simultaneously working on the single "master". Multiple changes to a document can happen very quickly, so quickly that it is sometimes necessary to revert to a previous version. Co-authors can continue editing down to the last minute. The GH and KP pilot of Google Docs proved very successful both in terms of the process and the product.

Google Docs greatly accelerates the writing of collaborative documents. This acceleration requires a different mindset. The lead author loses some control over the process, and must have an appreciation for the fact that collaborative authoring typically improves a document, which is magnified in the process of real-time group editing.