

Health Policy Forums

The Changing Landscape of Health Services Research and Policy

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AcademyHealth's mission is to advance health care decision making through health services research. As reform legislation continues to unfold, this mission is critical to understanding how to best utilize available resources to maximize the health of the entire population.

At a recent forum, Dr. Erin Holve discussed how data can be transformed into innovation in health care, emphasizing that researchers can make meaningful contributions to policy through their work. AcademyHealth seeks to support health services research and develop a "Learning Healthcare System" in which policy decisions are validated by data. Through this system, AcademyHealth hopes to achieve relevance, reliability, and responsiveness – engaging stakeholders, introducing methodological rigor, and assuring timeliness and openness.

As the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARA) is fully implemented more funding will

become available to advance health services research. The increased focus is good news for the industry, but necessitates development of an infrastructure that supports learning across networks. Dr. Holve described a health data ecosystem in which all communities – patients, providers, community leaders, policymakers, researchers, and corporations – work together to find synergies. This idea originated from Todd Park, Chief Technology Officer at the Department of Health and Human Services, and is validated by a recently launched website www.HealthData.gov, an effort to share community health data quickly.

Beyond development of a learning community, Dr. Holve shared news of several emerging data resources available to researchers. She discussed expanded claims data, electronic health records and registries, as well as "mashups" which occur when data is merged from various sources. Patient-contributed data is also a new area

and includes patient-reported information, biomonitoring, and crowd-sourced data. There is currently an opportunity to determine what personal use of data will look like, and how researchers can compile, compare and utilize this emerging area of research. These new sources of data will require stringent privacy and security precautions.

In addition to developing a research community, AcademyHealth is focused on educating the general community on the value of health services research. A more informed public understands the value of their personal health information and the importance of their participation. Dr. Holve admits that the research community could improve its efforts in this area, and urges researchers to represent their field by engaging the public so that they understand how this work is beneficial to patients and providers.