



REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

US Congress Establishes New Advisory Committee on Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Programs

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency of the US Department of Health and Human Services, directs national programs that improve the nation's health by assuring equitable access to comprehensive, quality health care for all. Through its four bureaus (key program areas), HRSA works to improve and extend life for people living with HIV/AIDS, provide primary health care to medically underserved people, serve women and children through state programs, and train a health workforce that is both diverse and motivated to work in underserved communities. The Bureau of Health Professions (BHPr) seeks to address the issues of health workforce education.

Nearly 3000 communities throughout the US do not have enough providers to meet basic medical, dental and mental health needs. Half of these communities are located in rural areas and most of the rest are in poor, urban neighborhoods. The BHPr seeks to address these problems by creating a health care workforce that is up to the challenges of the new century: delivering quality health care in underserved areas and meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population.

Within the BHPr, the Division of Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Linkages promotes academic and community partnerships and focuses health professions education and training on identifying and meeting health care needs of underserved communities. Programs assist academic health institutions with broad interdisciplinary expertise to form partnerships with states and communities to educate health professions students in community-based settings and also meet urgent health care needs. These programs include the following.

- Community-based *Area Health Education Centers* (AHECs) that (1) form linkages between health care delivery systems and educational resources in underserved communities; (2) create collaborative community-based education and training opportunities for health professionals, students and primary care resident physicians; (3) increase the number of individuals from minority and underserved communities who enter health careers; and (4) support multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary training in response to community needs.
- *Health Education and Training Centers* (HETCs) that (1) address health care needs along the border between the United States and Mexico, in Florida, and other areas with unmet health care needs; and (2) conduct training in health education services, including training to prepare community health workers.

- *Geriatric Education Centers* (GECs) that (1) support the training and residencies of geriatrics professionals; (2) provide services to and foster collaborative relationships among health professions educators (organizations and institutions that sponsor formal and informal educational programs and activities for faculty, students and practitioners) within defined geographic areas (states, counties, metropolitan areas or portions thereof); and (3) strengthen multidisciplinary training of health professionals to diagnose, treat and prevent disease and other health problems that older people face.
- The *Quentin N. Burdick Program for Rural Interdisciplinary Training* that emphasizes interdisciplinary training for health care practitioners in rural areas.
- Special Project Grants that support (1) *Allied Health Special Projects* to increase enrollment, provide career advancement, and develop interdisciplinary programs and new curricula; (2) *Chiropractic Demonstration Projects* to investigate ways that chiropractors and physicians may collaborate on effective treatment for spinal and/or lower back conditions; and (3) special projects that establish or expand graduate programs in *behavioral and mental health professions*.

The US Congress, in the 1999 reauthorization of the Public Health Service Act (PHS) (42 USC 294f, Section 756), set forth standards for the establishment of a national *Advisory Committee on Interdisciplinary, Community-Based Linkages*. The duties of the Advisory Committee are to review these programs and:

- provide advice and recommendations to the US Secretary of Health and Human Services concerning policy and program development, and other matters of significance regarding interdisciplinary, community-based activities; and
- prepare and submit to the Secretary, the Committee on Labor and Human Resources of the Senate, and the Committee of the House of Representatives, a report describing the activities of the Advisory Committee, including findings and recommendations made by the Committee.

The initial report of the Advisory Committee will be issued in November 2001. The committee will continue to function in its advisory capacity and will issue subsequent reports on findings and recommendations concerning BHPi interdisciplinary health professions policy and program development.

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Center for Problem-Based Learning at Samford University

The Center is an arm of the Samford PBL Initiative, a project supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The Initiative seeks to answer the following questions:

- Does PBL improve student learning and skill development?
- Can PBL be successful in conventionally funded higher education?
- How can colleges and universities most effectively integrate PBL?

The Initiative includes the *Center for PBL Peer Review*.

The Samford PBL-PR project is exploring ways to document the scholarship of teaching as it relates to PBL courses. They are currently accepting applications for mini-grants from national and international faculty to develop PBL course portfolios that will be peer-reviewed and potentially—if meeting standards of excellence—published on an online registry.

Samford's Center will provide peer evaluation of the design, delivery, and documentation of PBL courses.

For additional information on problem-based learning and the Samford Initiative, please visit the following website: <<http://www.samford.edu/pbl>>.

This website serves as a clearinghouse of information about PBL in undergraduate and professional education.

(Note: For news about a related initiative, please see the Letter to the Editor, p. 333, in this issue.)

Websites Related to Systematic Reviews

For your possible interest and use, the following websites provide information about systematic reviews of evidence as it relates to health care practice and health professions education.

- EPPi Centre: <<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/home.htm>>
- Cochrane Collaboration: <<http://www.update-software.com/ccweb/default.html>>
- Campbell Collaboration: <<http://campbell.gse.upenn.edu/>>
- Best Evidence Medical Education (BEME): <<http://www.bemecollaboration.org/>>