Earlier this year, the director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced that a panel had been appointed to investigate conflict of interest allegations among senior NIH scientists who received consulting fees and stock options from drug companies.

In another recent incident, the author of a British study linking autism with the childhood vaccine that protects against measles, mumps, and rubella failed to reveal that he had a substantial conflict of interest when he conducted the research: He was also doing paid research for a group of parents of autistic children who were interested in suing for damages that they believed were caused by the vaccine. As a result of the conflict, the study was retracted this spring.

While these events focused on clinical research, as have many similar occurrences that garnered public scrutiny, health services researchers are no less vulnerable to conflicts of interest. Indeed, they are more at risk than ever, as the fields of health services research and policy analysis have become increasingly commercial endeavors that are conducted in a variety of settings and draw on multiple sources of funding.

AcademyHealth recognizes the need for the health services research community to reassure the public, policymakers, funders, and journals that financial or other interests will not be permitted to compromise the integrity of their research. For that reason, the AcademyHealth Board convened a committee to develop ethical guidelines to help health services researchers identify and address potential conflict of interests. The committee will solicit feedback on the draft guidelines at the meeting of AcademyHealth members at the Annual Research Meeting in San Diego, which will take place Monday, June 7, at 5:45 p.m. AcademyHealth has also asked for member comments earlier this spring through an electronic member survey.
As we now gather for the 21st Annual Research Meeting in San Diego, I’d like to take this opportunity to reflect on AcademyHealth’s progress in the past year and how we are strengthening the fields of health services research and health policy, and improving our collective capacity to improve health and health care in this country.

During 2003, AcademyHealth offered a variety of well-received programs and products and ended the year on a solid financial footing. I invite you to review our 2003 accomplishments in AcademyHealth’s new online annual report at www.academyhealth.org/annualreport. We have achieved a stable membership base, with 3,700 individual members and 125 organizational affiliates at present, and hope to reach our goal of 4,000 individuals and 130 organizations by the end of this year. We are especially gratified by the enthusiastic response to our new interest group structure. With eight interest groups now formed and three others in development, we have nearly 1,000 enrollees. We hope these groups will provide you with more opportunities to become involved in AcademyHealth.

Increasingly, we are using electronic products and publications so our members can easily access information about AcademyHealth’s programs and services online. In addition to the 2003 Annual Report, we have launched an “expertise directory” for our members to indicate their major areas of expertise. And, later this summer, we will launch AcademyHealth Partners, an electronic bi-monthly organizational affiliate newsletter, which will enable our organizational partners to update our members on their programs and research.

Your AcademyHealth is also addressing critical issues that will have a major impact on the future of the field of health services research and on our capacity to inform policy and practice:

- Ethical Guidelines for Managing Conflicts of Interest in Health Services Research. Our committee, chaired by Ezekiel Emanuel, M.D., Ph.D., has outlined guidance and approaches to help our field understand and manage conflicts of interest (see article on p. 1).
- Placement, Funding, and Coordination of Federal Health Services Research. The committee, chaired by Sheila Burke, is developing recommendations regarding health services and comparative effectiveness research that will be presented to Congress as it considers the reauthorization of federal agencies funding this research.
- Knowledge Transfer. AcademyHealth was selected by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to serve as one of their new knowledge transfer and application contractors for a new multi-year initiative to strengthen how research gets disseminated and used to improve health policy and practice.
- Core Mission Working Group. Through this group, AcademyHealth is developing proposals for how we can best contribute to our core mission responsibility of promoting the translation of research findings and the lessons of experience into useful information for policy and management decisions.

Learn about these and other AcademyHealth programs and initiatives at the Annual Meeting of Members on Monday, June 7, 5:45 – 6:45 p.m.

W. David Helms, Ph.D.
President and CEO
AcademyHealth
What Is a Conflict of Interest?
The primary interest of health services researchers is to generate and disseminate valid and reliable research that informs policy and practice, and to ensure integrity in the process. However, individuals typically have many secondary interests that may relate to other roles and commitments, such as teaching, administration, political advocacy, obligations to employers, and funding for future research and analysis. Although these interests are often admirable activities in their own right, conflicts of interest can arise when secondary concerns distort investigators’ judgments regarding their primary goal to produce valid research.

Health services research and policy analysis have become increasingly commercial endeavors that are conducted in various settings and draw on multiple funding sources.

Conflicts of interest can occur when initiating research projects, designing study methods, analyzing data, or disseminating research findings, and they can involve financial or non-financial secondary interests.

AcademyHealth’s Conflict of Interest Guidelines
In late 2002, AcademyHealth’s Board of Directors established a diverse, 12-member Ethical Guidelines Committee comprising individuals from a variety of organizations and reflecting a wide range of disciplines. Chaired by Ezekiel J. Emanuel, M.D., Ph.D.—the director of the Department of Clinical Bioethics at the National Institutes of Health—the Committee was charged with providing practical guidance to individuals and organizations who may confront potential conflicts of interest.

“Having helped develop similar guidelines for biomedical researchers, I am struck by how different the conflicts of interest they face are compared to those confronted by health services researchers and policymakers,” says Dr. Emanuel. Indeed, the committee recognized that there are important characteristics that distinguish health services research from clinical research, including the following:

◆ The predominant financial conflict for health services researchers is less likely than for clinical investigators to be related to their personal financial interest (e.g., as the holders of stock in the manufacturer of the drug under investigation). Rather, health services researchers’ major financial conflict is likely to involve the financial viability of future research possibilities. For example, a researcher may feel compromised if private or public sponsors suggest (directly or, more often, indirectly) that they may withhold future grant funding if he or she is not compliant with their requests.

◆ Health services research findings are frequently relevant to political, legal, and regulatory proceedings. Researchers and sponsors may occupy the role of advocates in public arenas, making it important but difficult to distinguish between research and advocacy roles.

◆ Because of the limited feasibility of controlled trials in health services research, such research often relies on study designs and data sources that are more likely to involve compromises, potentially limiting the internal validity of the methods. Health services research often involves numerous decisions that rely on judgments that cannot be specified in advance and for which objective criteria may be difficult to determine.

◆ In health services research, a substantial share of funding comes from corporate, foundation, or public sponsors with direct financial, programmatic, or institutional interests in the research outcome.

◆ Finally, health services researchers are employed by many types of institutions, each with distinctive characteristics, interests, standard operating procedures, and perceptions of what constitutes a conflict of interest both within the organization and with outside sponsors.

The committee took these characteristics into consideration in developing its proposed guidelines for the field, which include specific recommendations on managing such conflicts in the context of initiating research, conducting research, and reporting research.

The AcademyHealth Board plans to approve these guidelines this year, based on the feedback the committee receives on the draft guidelines during the review process.

AcademyHealth will broadly disseminate the final report to researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders, and will seek its publication in major peer-reviewed journals. Because AcademyHealth is a professional society without enforcement authority, these guidelines will be recommendations rather than rules. Moreover, they are intended to complement, not replace, existing policies at institutions housing researchers and policymakers.
2004 AcademyHealth Award Winners

Each year, AcademyHealth honors health services research and health policy leaders with several prestigious awards, which will be presented during the 2004 Annual Research Meeting, June 6–8 in San Diego.

Distinguished Investigator Awards
This year, AcademyHealth recognizes two outstanding researchers.

Stuart Altman, Ph.D., is the Sol C. Chaikin Professor of National Health Policy at The Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University and a noted economist. His research interests focus primarily on federal and state health policy. He has served on a variety of government commissions, including the Legislative Health Care Task Force for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare, and the Prospective Payment Assessment Commission.

Dr. Altman was the deputy assistant secretary for planning and evaluation/health at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare from 1971 to 1976, and later the dean of The Heller School from 1977 to 1993. He received master’s and doctoral degrees in economics from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Uwe Reinhardt, Ph.D., is the James Madison Professor of Political Economy and professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton University, where he has taught since 1968. He is also a respected health economist with strong interests in the uninsured and international health systems. He has served on a number of government committees and commissions, including the Physician Payment Review Commission and the National Advisory Council for Health Care Policy, Research, and Evaluation.

Dr. Reinhardt has authored more than 200 books, articles, and editorials, and he frequently testifies before Congress and other public bodies. He received a bachelor’s degree with honors in commerce and economics from the University of Saskatchewan and master’s and doctoral degrees in economics from Yale University.

Alice S. Hersh New Investigator Award

David M. Studdert, LL.B., Sc.D., is associate professor of law and public health at the Harvard School of Public Health, where he teaches health law and medical ethics. Before joining the faculty at Harvard, Dr. Studdert worked as a policy analyst at RAND, an advisor to the health minister in Victoria (Australia), and a practicing attorney. His research focuses on the interface between law and health policy.

Dr. Studdert has studied medical injury, disputes in managed care, malpractice law, product liability and mass torts, and informed consent. He holds a law degree from the University of Melbourne, and master’s and doctoral degrees from the Harvard School of Public Health. He was a fellow in the medical ethics program at Harvard Medical School in 1998.

Elizabeth A. McGlynn, Ph.D., received this award for her lead authorship on the article, “The Quality of Health Care Delivered to Adults in the United States,” which appeared in the June 26, 2003, New England Journal of Medicine.

The article is coauthored by Steven M. Asch, M.D., M.P.H.; Joan Kessey; Jennifer Hicks, M.P.H., Ph.D.; Alison DeCristofaro, M.P.H.; and Eve A. Kerr, M.D., M.P.H.

Dr. McGlynn is an associate director for RAND Health and director of the Center for Research on Quality in Health Care. She is a nationally known expert on methods for assessing and reporting on quality of health care delivery. She has served on a number of influential advisory committees including the Strategic Framework Board, which developed a design for a national quality monitoring and reporting system, and the National Committee for Quality Assurance’s Committee on Performance Measurement.

Dr. McGlynn received a bachelor’s degree in international political economy from The Colorado College, a master’s degree in public policy studies from the University of Michigan, and a Ph.D. in public policy analysis from the RAND Graduate School.

Dissertation Award


Previously, Dr. Tucker held positions as a quality improvement engineer at General Mills and as a nuclear quality control engineer at General Dynamics. She has a bachelor’s degree from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a master’s degree from Purdue University.
Long Road Ahead for Federal FY 2005 Budget

This year’s budget battle represents a real challenge for the supporters of health services research. Nonetheless, there are several positives, including:

◆ For the first time in three years, the administration’s budget for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) does not propose a cut.
◆ The Medicare Modernization Act of 2004 included an authorization for $50 million for AHRQ to conduct studies evaluating the effectiveness and appropriateness of health services and prescription drugs.
◆ The President proposed a $22-million increase in the budget for the National Center for Health Statistics.

Still, the political reality is that this will be a very hard year for any agency to receive increases. Reports from Capitol Hill indicate that the appropriators will be fighting over every dollar. Under the House budget resolution, there will not be enough money to pay for everything in the President’s budget, let alone to support any increases, including the President’s $22-million increase for the NCHS. The appropriators will also have a difficult time finding the $50 million authorized for AHRQ to do comparative effectiveness research as part of the Medicare Modernization Act.

Presidential politics will also play into whether Congress can pass these appropriation bills before they adjourn for the election. Depending on whether there is a new President or whether the Democrats regain control of either the House or Senate, this could push final resolution of spending bills until January 2005 or even into the spring.

AcademyHealth members and other supporters of health services research can stay abreast of the latest budget developments through the Coalition Web site at www.chsr.org. The site also allows visitors to sign up for legislative e-mail updates and alerts, and provides opportunities for people to help ensure adequate funding for health services research by writing letters and e-mails to their Congresspersons.

Linking Long-Term Care Knowledge to Action

With the U.S. population growing older and an increasing number of Americans living well beyond their 80s, demand for long-term care services has accelerated. However, little progress has been made in addressing, in a systematic way, many of the long-term care issues that hamper the development of a rational continuum of services.

Believing that a necessary first step is to bring researchers, policymakers, and providers together to exchange information and seek solutions, AcademyHealth is conducting a series of annual colloquia sponsored by The Commonwealth Fund. Titled “Building Bridges: Making a Difference in Long-Term Care,” the series will create momentum and stimulate growth within the field. The first colloquium will be held Saturday, June 5, 8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m., in conjunction with AcademyHealth’s Annual Research Meeting in San Diego.

“Through this series, we hope not only to raise long-term care to a position of greater salience on the national policy agenda but also to build a network of individuals working together to create change,” says Deborah Rogal, senior manager at AcademyHealth and project director for the colloquia.

The colloquia will build on a meeting that AcademyHealth conducted in Chantilly, Va., in 2002 to address the role of research in strengthening policy and service delivery in LTC. That meeting:

◆ Identified ways that research has had an impact on policy and practice;
◆ Affirmed the need for strong, sustained LTC research;
◆ Identified ways that researchers, providers, and policymakers can collaborate to identify research needs and incorporate findings into LTC service delivery and policy; and
◆ Initiated a dialogue among researchers, providers, policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders on LTC challenges.

“Collaborating with The Commonwealth Fund was a natural fit,” says David Helms, Ph.D., president and CEO of AcademyHealth, “because of their commitment to supporting research and policy analysis to improve Medicare and quality of care for frail elders.”

Visit www.academyhealth.org/ltc for updates. For more information on Commonwealth Fund-supported research and publications, visit www.cmwf.org.
Professional Development Opportunities for Researchers and Policymakers

AcademyHealth strives to expand and improve the scientific basis of health services research and health policy, as well as to increase the capabilities and skills of researchers. Recent data indicate that AcademyHealth members value these priorities as well: Based on results from the member survey we conducted in 2003, 85 percent of respondents indicated that providing professional development opportunities was an “important” or “very important” focus for the organization.

For these reasons, AcademyHealth is committed to offering a well-rounded professional development portfolio.

Educational Programs for Researchers

In addition to opportunities at AcademyHealth’s Annual Research Meeting (ARM) to attend 90-minute methods workshops and skill-building sessions, AcademyHealth offers an ongoing series of Seminars in Health Services Research Methods. These seminars are provided in both live and online formats.

In 1997, a series of full-day seminars became a popular adjunct to the Annual Research Meeting. This year’s meeting, we are offering six methods seminars on a variety of topics, including:

- Cost-Effectiveness Analysis;
- Risk Adjustment;
- Qualitative Data Analysis Software;
- The Healthcare Cost & Utilization Project (HCUP);
- Geographic Information Systems and Analysis; and
- Medical Expenditure Panel Survey Data (MEPS).

An important trend in these day-long seminars is the demand for computer capability so that faculty and participants can manipulate data or demonstrate software that facilitates research. For the first time at the 2004 ARM (June 6–8 in San Diego), AcademyHealth will support the seminars with a “wi-fi” network, which will enable participants to bring laptop computers for online learning.

AcademyHealth has also held several three-day seminars on “Using Federal Databases,” which are co-sponsored by federal agencies that manage a variety of health databases, such as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Veterans Administration, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). This seminar series teaches participants how to access and work with major health databases, including HCUP; MEPS; the National Health Care Survey; the National Health Interview Survey; and patient, financial, human resource, organizational management, and patient and administrative data maintained by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

AcademyHealth is considering offering a new program on federal databases that focuses on the difficulties of using these data under the health privacy regulations enacted as part of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

The methods seminars are also offered in a two-hour audio and Web-based format. A series of three “Cyber Seminars” concluded in April; they followed an earlier series of three Cyber Seminars in fall 2003. The Cyber Seminars are archived and available to those individuals who may have missed the live event. This series, which began in 2001, has received high marks from participants for its quality and convenience.

Learning Opportunities for Policy Professionals

AcademyHealth is piloting several educational programs designed for health policy professionals. “Health Policy and Politics: An Orientation to Decision-Making in Washington,” is a three-and-a-half day program held each fall to provide professional development opportunities for up to 35 policymakers and health service researchers with an interest in national health policy development and implementation. The orientation provides insight into the Washington health policy environment and its key players. Partially supported by the National Center for Health Statistics as an adjunct to the NCHS-AcademyHealth Health Policy Fellowship program, the orientation includes presentations by well-known speakers, interactive discussions, hands-on tutorials, and site visits on Capitol Hill.

AcademyHealth’s five-module audioconference series is an offshoot of the live orientation. These interactive audioconferences feature experts discussing the dynamics of health policymaking and include ample time for questions and answers. Like the Cyber Seminars, this series is archived for use by universities and others who prefer to listen at their convenience.

“Health Policy Tools & Techniques,” is a series of minicourses previewed at the 2004 National Health Policy Conference. Two courses were offered—“Evaluation and the Policymaking Process” and “Cost-Effectiveness Analysis for Policymaking”—and, based on comments from participants, AcademyHealth is already planning to offer two new minicourses at the 2005 National Health Policy Conference (February 4, 2005, in Washington, D.C.).

AcademyHealth continually works to improve our educational programs and to offer new opportunities to build the next generation of health services researchers and health policy professionals. For more information about all these programs, visit the AcademyHealth Web site at www.academyhealth.org/conferences/index.htm.
members matter

Moving On and Moving Up

Keep in touch with friends and colleagues by sending your career news to membernews@academyhealth.org. Submissions of no more than 25 words will be printed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Lois Colburn, M.A., has joined the University of Nebraska Medical Center as director of the Center for Continuing Education.

David Keepnews, Ph.D., J.D., R.N., is now the director of the Office of Policy Development at the New York Academy of Medicine.

Patrick A. Rivers, Ph.D., M.B.A., has accepted a position as associate professor and director of the Health Management Program at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Edward Salsberg, M.P.A., has joined the Association of American Medical Colleges as director of the Center for Workforce Studies.

Laura P. Shone, Dr.P.H., M.S.W., is now assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Rochester.

Correction
The name of the following member was misspelled in our previous issue. We regret the error.

Arif Ahmed, B.D.S., Ph.D., M.S.P.H., has accepted a position as assistant professor of health administration in the University of Missouri-Kansas City’s Cookingham Institute of Public Affairs.

News from the Journals

The Milbank Quarterly
The summer Milbank Quarterly includes the second part of an article examining the evidence that income inequality is a determinant of population health. Another piece describes how the nursing home field in the United States maintains a lower tier that is defined by its high proportion of Medicaid residents. The issue also includes an examination of the halting growth of Medicare’s PACE program, which seeks to provide integrated health and social services for the frail elderly. Finally, the journal contains a comprehensive political history of Medicare prescription drug coverage.

HSR
In the June issue, HSR is pleased to announce the winner of its first John M. Eisenberg Article-of-the-Year Award in Health Services Research. The award recognizes excellence within the broad policy-relevant research areas that Dr. Eisenberg had promoted. The winning article is “Improving Care for Minorities: Can Quality Improvement Interventions Improve Care and Outcomes for Depressed Minorities? Results from a Randomized Clinical Trial” (HSR, April 2003, Vol. 38, pp. 613–30). The journal also includes summaries of panel discussions from AcademyHealth’s 2003 Annual Research Meeting on nursing workforce issues and translating research into policy proposals.

Health Affairs
The July/August issue of Health Affairs will feature a special section on the malpractice crisis, along with features on the CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield conversion and Medicare coverage policy. The DataWatch section includes an examination of the connection between nurse work-hours and patient safety and a look at the effectiveness of drug benefits in helping Medicare beneficiaries to afford prescriptions.

Organizational Affiliate Announcements

In June 2005, Roger J. Bulger, M.D., will step down as president of the Association of Academic Health Centers and continue work as chair of the national Medicine/Public Health Initiative.

NIHCM Foundation is soliciting entries for its Eleventh Annual Health Care Research Award. A $5,000 prize accompanies the award, which recognizes outstanding research in health care best practices and implementation of health care policy. Applications must be received by September 30, 2004. Visit www.nihcm.org for details.

Health Administration Press, the publishing department of the American College of Healthcare Executives, is pleased to announce that it will soon release a new book. Titled “Evaluating the Healthcare System: Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Equity, Third Edition,” the book defines and illustrates the measurement and relevance of effectiveness, efficiency, and equity as criteria for evaluating health care system performance. Its authors are Lu Ann Aday, Charles E. Begley, David R. Lairson, and Rajesh Balkrishnan. For more information, or to purchase the book, visit www.ache.org/pubs/aday3.cfm.
Attend our Health Policy Orientation in Washington, D.C., this fall to get an in-depth look through the eyes of experts at how health policy is developed and implemented in the nation's capital.

AcademyHealth's three-and-a-half day orientation provides a comprehensive introduction to the key players who shape our nation's health policy, formal and informal policymaking processes, and critical health policy issues, ranging from health care quality to costs to the uninsured. The orientation is targeted at anyone interested in learning more about health policy, including students, fellows, federal and state government employees, and private-sector or university-based professionals whose work intersects with health policy.

The program includes presentations by many health care experts, including Charles Kahn, president of the Federation of American Hospitals; Jeanne Lambrew, associate professor at George Washington University; and Marina Weiss, senior vice president of public policy and government affairs at The March of Dimes. The orientation also includes interactive panels and group discussions, hands-on tutorials, and site visits on Capitol Hill.

Attendees will have the opportunity to interact informally with leading experts; learn what drives policy issues and how they are handled in the Washington political arena; and see first-hand how research is translated into action.

Space is limited, so register early at: www.academyhealth.org/orientation/register.