

**Office of Research and
Methodology Review Panel**

**Report to the
NCHS Board of
Scientific Counselors**

May 7, 2013

Panel Members

- Gale Boyd
- Rod Little, Chair
- Sharon Lohr
- Peter Miller
- Susan Schechter
- Hermann Habermann, BSC Liaison
- Alan Zaslavsky, BSC Liaison

Review Process

- Panel received advance information, including ORM self-study
- Conference call established approach and request for more information
- Panel held on-site meeting Feb 5
 - Presentations by NCHS and ORM staff
 - Staff available for questions and discussion
- Draft report prepared, circulated and revised; final report presented to BSC

Panel Reviewed

- History of ORM
- Structure and Organization
- Activities
- Accomplishments and Strengths
- Challenges

Overview of ORM

- Approx 50 multidisciplinary FTEs and contractors.
- Charged with advancing state of knowledge in four core areas: measurement, data collection, data analysis, and dissemination. Primary activities include:
 - conducting research
 - providing technical assistance
 - collaborating with other agencies and
 - developing applications.

ORM major activities

- ORM's role is integral to NCHS mission to provide statistical information that will guide actions and policies to improve the health of the American people.
- ORM primarily serves NCHS, but also CDC, DHHS, the Federal statistical system, and the broader scientific community.
- ORM collaborates with NCHS data divisions on collection, analysis and dissemination of high-quality data. ORM's research advances science within NCHS, and externally.

ORM Structure

- ORM Office of the Director (OD)
- Statistical Research and Survey Design Staff (SRSDS)
- Questionnaire Design Research Laboratory (QDRL)
- Research Data Center (RDC)

ORM Office of the Director

Under its current Director, ORM is on an excellent trajectory. Some challenges:

- Staff recruitment and retention
- QDRL dependence on reimbursable agreements
- Expand survey measurement activities beyond cognitive interviewing
- RDC expansion: space, access issues
- Strategic planning: balancing basic research and technical assistance

Panel Recommendations for the ORM Office of the Director

- 1.1. Endorse the current mixed research model (researchers centralized and in programs)
- 1.2. Applaud recruitment efforts: press on!
- 1.3. Seek to increase ORM's strategic role within the NCHS
- 1.4. Imbed ORM researchers in NCHS programs – e.g. by “triple citizenship model”
- 1.5. Expand the scope of research agenda on survey measurement activities

Panel Recommendations for the ORM Office of the Director

1.6. Continue to value methodological innovation, peer-reviewed research -- but not at expense of delaying important programmatic activities

1.7 Promote and maintain regular communication between ORM and data divisions

1.8. Finalize split of QDRL and RDC staffs

1.9. Establish regular dialog with research directors in other agencies

Statistical Research and Survey Design Staff (SRSDS)

- Core areas of strength include survey design, variance estimation, small area estimation, missing data methods, and record linkage.
- Statisticians within ORM are nationally recognized for the quality of their research and are highly visible in the scientific community.
- Report describes a number of impressive activities
- Close relationship with Office and Analysis and Epidemiology a strong feature

Panel Recommendations for the SRSDS

2.1. Role and size of SRSDS – endorse strong unit for statistical research and collaboration within ORM. Hire at least 5 additional statisticians.

2.2. Strategic role – SRDRS staff should be imbedded in data divisions as part of collaborative team, and play a major proactive role in strategic decisions on design and analysis of NCHS surveys.

Panel Recommendations for the SRSDS

2.3. Coverage – At least 2 SRSDS statisticians should be knowledgeable about each of the major NCHS programs. Implement “triple citizenship” model to achieve this.

2.4. Collaboration with QDRL – Encourage greater cooperation between SRSDS and QDRL.

Questionnaire Design Research Laboratory (QDRL)

First cognitive research lab – model widely adopted elsewhere

Major role in development for sexual identity questions for NHIS, disability questions for UN Statistical Commission

Developed innovative application suite for questionnaire development and evaluation

Strong, laudable emphasis on publishing in scientific literature

Panel Recommendations for the QDRL

3.1. Research focus –current commendable focus on standardized procedures, careful documentation and peer-reviewed publication should be balanced with service delivery to survey staff.

Panel Recommendations for the QDRL

3.2 Collaboration – specific designations of each QDRL staff member to one or two data division in “triple citizenship” model

3.3. Work prioritization – process should include periodic and proactive solicitation of NCHS program needs from Director’s office

Panel Recommendations for the QDRL

3.4. Strategies to address time-sensitive QDRL needs should be developed, including:

- Establish “swat” teams
- Establish robust pool of subjects for speedy recruitment
- Establish streamlined OMB and ERB clearance process

3.5. Monitor and evaluate usage of application suite, to identify and address impediments to usage.

Research Data Center (RDC)

- Represents excellent example of balancing of data dissemination mission with confidentiality protection.
- Researchers 1) submit proposals for review by the RDC staff, once approved 2) conduct the analysis at a secure computer lab, and 3) obtain analysis results that undergo a disclosure review.
- RDC appears to have managed a considerable growth in activities fairly well. Customer service seems good, as measured by informal poll of researchers.
- The review process for researcher access seems timely and well managed.

Panel Recommendations for the RDC

4.1. NCHS should consider RDC researchers as a resource for new ideas for existing or new products, by promoting two-way communications

4.2. Develop recusal policy to encourage transparency and avoid conflicts of interest.



Panel Recommendations for the RDC

4.3. Flat fees – Implement flat fees and establish student researcher waiver process

4.4. Encourage collaborative relationship with the Census RDC network – Develop relationship with the local, on-site Census network administrators and university site directors



Panel Recommendations for the RDC

- 4.5. 24/7 access at remote Census RDC sites – change requirement to have Census employee physically present to allow 24/7 access

Conclusion

- ORM is a key office for ensuring that NCHS carries out its mission to provide high-quality information about health
- ORM is currently on an excellent trajectory
- Panel thanks ORM and NCHS for their cooperation and assistance, and hopes its recommendations will help ORM to further advance the NCHS mission