Our CERCIT researchers have done comparative effectiveness research on a variety of populations with and without cancer. The research they are doing with CERCIT data is often complemented with their work on studies that have assessed care captured in private insurance claims data. As well, their work with survey data provides information on those not covered by any insurance. In this issue of the TPHJ several articles describe the work of the CERCIT investigators in detail. The article by Jaramillo and Tan provides some interesting insights into cancer screening and trends in Texas and how these are being studied. The work described in the papers by Smith et al. and Rodriguez use the new Texas linked Medicare dataset to evaluate care of Texans with specific types of cancer. The study done by Eberth et al. is an example of enhancing administrative data (such as most CERCIT data is), with survey data that provides information on behaviors reportedly related to cancer. This study not only expands our analyses to examine the cost of care to payers but also our focus, to encompass cancer survivors. Surprisingly, it is an increasingly important issue for healthcare providers and consumers.

CERCIT data resource development continues. In a process similar to that used to link the TCR and Medicare databases, TCR data will be linked with Medicaid claims data for Texans. Again, the linkage is being coordinated between TCR, CMS and UTMB. Additionally, the existing linked TCR Medicare data is being updated to include cases diagnosed through 2009 and their claims through 2010. The investigators and collaborators in the CERCIT project look forward to sharing more of our results with you—the public health professionals who can help us promote smart, quality cancer related care.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:
The lead investigators in the CERCIT data management core acknowledge the work of all the analysts and collaborators on the projects at UTMB, MDA and Rice. Many thanks to Drs. Dong Zhang, Vivian Ho, Yong-fong Kuo, Hoang Nguyen and Melanie Williams and Yu-li Lin and Cheryl Bowcock for their diligence in ensuring a quality data resource.

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Training Core- Principal Investigators:
Drs. Jean Freeman (UTMB) and Linda Elting (MDA)

BACKGROUND:
One of the major objectives of CERCIT is to train the next generation of cancer outcomes and comparative effectiveness investigators in Texas. To this end, the CERCIT Training Core recruits and educates investigators in cancer comparative effectiveness research. For a selected group of clinician scientists from the participating institutions, the Core provides mentored training, focused on the skills and research experiences necessary to become investigators and future leaders and mentors in cancer outcomes research.

The main objectives of the CERCIT Training Core are to:
1. Provide courses, workshops, seminars, and learning activities focused on comparative effectiveness research using the Texas Cancer Registry and related databases.
2. Develop individual mentoring programs for selected early career clinician-scientists at the CERCIT consortium institutions.

METHODS:
The faculty expertise, resources, and academic infrastructure to accomplish the aims and objectives of the Core do not exist at a single institution. Therefore, the CERCIT Training Core operates as a research and training consortium involving the five institutions.

This consortium is well suited to develop education, training, and career development activities focused on cancer CER using the Texas Cancer Registry linked to other databases (see Data Management Core). The five institutions are located in close geographic proximity (within 50 miles) and have a record of previous collaborations. Below we highlight some of the strengths directly related to education and training in CER and cancer using large databases.

University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB). UTMB has established academic and training programs in cancer and large database research. Strengths include a Clinical Science PhD Program with success in training clinician-scientists in health services research, an established Sealy Center on Aging with funded programs in cancer comparative effectiveness research,T32 grants with emphasis on cancer and aging that support pre- and postdoctoral fellows, and Core investigators with extensive experience using SEER, Medicare, and Texas Cancer Registry databases. UTMB is also home to the UTMB Cancer Center and the Center for Comparative Effectiveness and Cancer Outcomes (CCECO) (see: http://www.utmb.edu/).

MD Anderson Cancer Center. MD Anderson is one of the nation’s original three comprehensive cancer centers established by the National Cancer Act of 1971. It is both a degree-granting academic institution and a cancer treatment and research center located in the Texas Medical Center in Houston. MD Anderson maintains a Department of Faculty Development that sponsors and supports many programs for faculty and trainees. These are divided into three areas: professional and career development; faculty health and well-being, and leadership. Components of these programs are included in CERCIT training activities (see: http://www.mdanderson.org/).

University of Texas School of Public Health. The School of Public Health offers the MS, MPH, DrPH and PhD in fields related to public and population health. Faculty in the School are involved in a wide range of research with substantial experience and expertise in the analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of research involving administrative, public, and research databases. The School supports a number of Centers with direct relevance to the CERCIT Training Core. These include the Center for Health Services Research, the University of Texas Prevention Research Center, the Center for Transforming Public Health Systems, and the Institute for Health Policy (see: http://www.sph.uth.tmc.edu/).

Rice University – James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy. The Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University is internationally recognized as a forum for scholarly discourse and debate regarding important public policy issues and topics, including health care delivery and reform. It provides distinct opportunities for training.
education, and interaction with national and international experts in health care policy. Professor Vivian Ho is the James A. Baker III Institute Chair in Health Economics and a member of the CERCIT team. (see: http://www.bakerinstitute.org/)

Baylor College of Medicine. The Baylor College of Medicine includes a Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and School of Health Professions in addition to the Medical School. The Graduate Schools offer 14 graduate programs. Of particular interest to the CERCIT is the Clinical Scientist Training Program. The Clinical Scientist Training Program is committed to educating and training individuals to become successful, independent clinical investigators and future leaders in academic medicine and biomedical research. (see: http://www.bcm.edu/cstp/).

The members of the consortium work together to accomplish the goal of increasing the number of scientifically competent investigators conducting cancer focused comparative effectiveness research using the Texas Cancer Registry and other databases. To this end, the Core continues to provide:

• Workshops designed to introduce trainees and investigators in Texas to the need for and opportunities that exist to conduct comparative effectiveness research using administrative and research datasets. The goals of the workshops are to raise awareness and provide basic introductory information regarding the Texas Cancer Registry and related databases with a focus on the linked Texas Cancer Registry and Medicare claims data. The workshops cover information on basic data management and analysis and raise awareness among investigators on the importance of database research.

• Comparative Effectiveness Research Seminars where trainees present preliminary data, innovative uses of the linked databases, ideas for research topics, analyses, initial drafts of papers or ideas for grant applications and receive feedback in the form of suggested research questions to address, issues related to research methodology, interpretation of study findings, other pertinent research on the topics and alternative approaches to pursue, and ways of framing the research aims for a grant application.

• Research and Writing Interactive Seminars where senior faculty present on topics that involve written products (Literature Reviews, Study Design, Scientific Communication). Trainees share their work (e.g. drafts of manuscripts and grant applications) in future seminars and receive critiques from other seminar members. The process is facilitated by Dr. Goodwin.

A list of the workshops and seminars provided to date may be found at: http://www.txcercit.org/Activity.aspx

RESULTS:
To date, twenty clinician scientists have been recruited as trainees for the program, 12 from UTMB and 8 from MD Anderson. They include a diverse mix of faculty in surgical and medical oncology. The trainees have contributed (as first or co-author) to 20 publications or in press manuscripts related to cancer comparative effectiveness research. The studies address different topics related to cancer CER including complications of treatment, end of life care, survival estimates and adherence to recommended therapies.

In addition to their contributions to the scientific literature through CERCIT publications, the trainees contribute to the overall success of the CERCIT project in other ways. They enhance the education of their fellow scholars, peers and area comparative effectiveness researchers through presentations of their work during our workshop series. Of utmost importance is their development of skills to translate their knowledge into key messages for the public and policy makers in Texas. Working with CERCIT mentors and experts from all the CERCIT research and core projects, CERCIT scholars are becoming adept in disseminating their work to other investigators who can then apply relevant methods and findings to their own research.

CONCLUSIONS:
Our CERCIT investigators believe our training program to be unique. Scholars in our program have been successful in publishing their findings in outstanding scientific journals and presenting their work at local, state, and national meetings. Some have gone on to secure grants to continue their research after their training was completed. However, of utmost importance to Texas consumers, cancer survivors and many others, our training program participants have been very productive in reaching the public with their messages. Training Core faculty and scholars have been actively engaged in translating and disseminating the important findings from their comparative effectiveness research on cancer in Texas. CERCIT Training Core faculty believe these aspects of our program sets us apart from other training programs, as our scholars have become committed and skilled in the translation and dissemination of key messages for the public and policy makers. Please see details of their contributions through newspaper releases, announcements and opinion editorials described in the next article on the Knowledge Translation Core.

Knowledge and Translation Core – Principal Investigators:
Dr. Karl Eschbach and Anthony DiNuzzo (UTMB) and Dr. Leonard Zvelling (MDA)

BACKGROUND:
The principal purpose of the Center for Comparative Effectiveness Research on Cancer in Texas (CERCIT) is to conduct and share research on the effectiveness of cancer care in the state and to inform decisions that will improve the quality of care. The research projects of the CERCIT analyze care practices to identify which lead to good and which lead to poor health outcomes. Each attempts to identify gaps in services for populations—for example, in regions of the state or in particular ethnic or socioeconomic groups—where adoption of screening or definitive therapeutic practices after diagnosis could lead to improved survival and quality of life for people with cancer. CERCIT investigators identify patterns of practice that do not appear to have an optimal return to resource investment.

The CERCIT Knowledge Translation Core (KTC) shares information about the research findings of the CERCIT investigators with constituencies in Texas that need to make decisions that influence the quality of care. These constituencies are diverse, including, for example, members of the general public, cancer patients, clinicians, health care administrators, organizations that pay for cancer care, and state policymakers. Adding to this diversity is the diversity of the state itself—a large and complex state where available resources for health care vary in different sub-regions, and which are diverse in industrial base, economic resources, health care system, and the cultural heritage, racial-ethnic origins, health insurance coverage rates, and access to and attitudes toward health care. Thus, the KTC serves as a resource for information on all aspects of cancer care to the public, the healthcare community, local and statewide policy makers and governmental bodies in Texas.

To accomplish this purpose, the KTC has four specific aims:
1. To prepare a biennial report and periodic in-depth topical reports, on measures of cancer care in Texas.
2. To disseminate the findings of those reports to the public, healthcare providers and administrators, and legislative and executive policy makers throughout Texas.
3. To establish partnerships with public and private organizations in Texas concerned with improving cancer care to further the goal of achieving the highest possible quality of care.

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