

LESSONS LEARNED IN RESEARCH, COLLABORATION, AND DISSEMINATION IN A NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF NURSING RESEARCH-FUNDED RESEARCH CENTER

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This article provides the key findings of interviews and focus groups with researchers and administrators throughout a P30 Center on the issues of collaboration among researchers, multidisciplinary research, center support, and dissemination. The most notable findings confirmed throughout this process include methods of collaboration and shared strategies for subject recruitment. Specifically, the researchers participating in the P30 Center recommended that a research-intensive environment facilitate the ability of investigators to discuss their methods, struggles, and findings in ways that unite investigators toward a common goal to advance the science and improve health care. Researchers become isolated easily, thus running the risk of losing valuable time by duplicating others' work, falling short in fulfilling their commitments to scientific research, and losing opportunities to learn from each others' experiences. Especially in the realm of subject recruitment and study design, researchers often have similar problems and can benefit from both informal conversations and structured forums. Based on these findings, the authors provide recommendations for future collaborative research in schools of nursing. These include establishing certain key institutional structures and mechanisms by which established researchers can interact with junior investigators to train and mentor them. (Index words: Nursing; Collaboration; Research center; Multidisciplinary; Institutional support; Dissemination; Vulnerable populations; Self and family management; synthesis) *J Prof Nurs* 27:153–160, 2011. © 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES of Health (NIH) is the primary federal agency for the support of health research. Over the past four decades, the NIH has supported extramural research centers within universities, medical centers, hospitals, and other research institutions as a means of encouraging research related

to problems that have not been adequately studied by individual investigators. Establishing a successful, collaborative research center requires leadership and support in many different venues. In 1988, the National Institute of Nursing Research released its first request for academic nursing schools to apply to establish research centers. Investigators from the Yale School of Nursing (YSN) were successful in competing and securing a P20 grant (September 15, 2001 to August 31, 2005) and subsequently a P30 grant (September 30, 2004 to June 30, 2010) on Self and Family Management (see [Table 1](#) for description of centers). To meet the criteria for submitting an application, we had to have a number of critical elements already in place in our institution. These included a cadre of experienced investigators who were federally funded and had a common focused area of research of sufficient importance to warrant a concentration of resources, an infrastructure that

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Table 1. Definitions of P20 and P30 Center Grant Mechanisms**P20 Exploratory Center Grants**

To support planning for new programs, expansion or modification of existing resources, and feasibility studies to explore various approaches to the development of interdisciplinary programs that offer potential solutions to problems of special significance to the mission of the NIH. These exploratory studies may lead to specialized or comprehensive centers. Mechanism funded for 3 years.

P30 Core Center Grants

To support shared resources and facilities for categorical research by a number of investigators from different disciplines who provide a multidisciplinary approach to a joint research effort or from the same discipline who focus on a common research problem. The core grant is integrated with the center's component projects or program projects, although funded independently from them. This support, by providing more accessible resources, is expected to assure a greater productivity than from the separate projects and program projects. Mechanism funded for 5 years.

facilitated the conduct of multidisciplinary research and collaboration among the faculty, and a research training program that prepared both pre- and postdoctoral fellows in the area related to the center's conceptual focus ([Committee for Assessment of NIH Centers of Excellence Programs, 2004](#)).

At the conclusion of a P30 5-year research center,¹ we analyzed and evaluated the successes and struggles of the Center's collaborative research. This evaluative process synthesized the research completed under the auspices of the Center and sought feedback from the researchers and administrators involved. The Center itself provided a venue for new researchers to become principal investigators (PIs) in an important field that built on YSN's research base. This article highlights the findings surrounding the Center's structures and research processes, including collaboration and mentoring among investigators' multidisciplinary research, Center support, and dissemination. We provide specific examples from the Center's research and recommendations for future initiatives. This work offers guidelines for faculty, researchers, and administrators to enhance their institutional ability to foster research and collaboration by building upon our successes and learning from our mistakes.

¹The 5-year YSN P30 Center for Self and Family Management of Vulnerable Populations emanated from the School's 3-year P20 Exploratory Nursing Research Center for Self Management Interventions. The structure of the Center included four cores: Administration (Dr. Grey and Dr. Redeker, codirectors, with Dr. Melkus and Dr. Sadler overseeing the emphasis on vulnerable populations), Methodological (Dr. Knafl and Dr. Funk, codirectors), Outcomes (Dr. Dixon and Dr. Whitmore, codirectors), and Dissemination (Dr. Cohen and Dr. McCorkle, codirectors). See [Table 1](#) for the description of these types of grants.

Methods

The work of this synthesis project was part of the P30's Dissemination Core, led by Dr. Cohen and Dr. McCorkle. The P30 Center's synthesis project had four main components:

1. To review the NIH call for P30 Centers, YSN's original funded grant, and the NIH Review Committee's Summary Statement;
2. To examine progress and final reports of 15 funded pilot studies to glean major themes;
3. To conduct three focus groups with 8–10 faculty investigators to discuss their research and experiences with the Center; and
4. To interview individually the Center's 2 PIs (the former and current) and selected members of the Center's Executive Committee and staff whose perspectives were particularly important for this synthesis work.

Questions for the interviews and focus groups were developed based on key themes that emerged from investigators' progress and final reports and input from the Center's Executive Committee. The interviews and focus groups were held over a 4-month period in the spring of 2009 and led by two members of the Dissemination Core of the Center, Sally Cohen and Ruth McCorkle, both of whom have professional relationships with most of the researchers and were able to convene productive and forthright meetings.

Analysis of the research core (established studies at the school before the grant) and pilot studies (those the Center itself funded) were organized into four groups. Research on diabetes was foundational for several core and pilot studies on diabetes in children and adults (see [Grey, 2000](#); [Grey, Boland, Davidson, Li, & Tamborlane, 2000](#); [Melkus, Maillet, Novak, Womack, & Hatch-Clein, 2002](#); [Schilling, Grey, & Knafl, 2002a, 2002b](#); [Whittemore, 2000](#); [Whittemore, Chase, Mandl, & Roy, 2001](#); [Whittemore et al., 2002](#)). Two additional identifiable themes were cancer-related research (see [Knobf & Sun, 2005](#); [McCorkle, 2006](#)) and studies on families with young children (see [Knafl, 1998, 1999](#)), leaving a few studies to be grouped in a fourth, general self and family management, cluster. Organizing the studies in this way facilitated synthesis and enhanced identification of overarching findings that spanned the Center's work.

Findings

Analysis of the focus groups, interviews, and review of documents led to identification of three interrelated themes: collaboration, multidisciplinary research, and center support. Each is important to understand the entire research endeavor that fell under the auspices of the Center (individual studies and collaboration among Center members) and to ascertain which institutional structures are most useful and important. A later section provides recommendations for nursing academic entities that want to establish a P30 or similar research center.

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