

Department of Population Medicine

Mission

The Department's mission is to improve health care delivery and population health through research and education, in partnership with health plans, delivery systems, and public health agencies. DPM's mission and activities are highly consonant with the National Academy of Medicine's advocacy for a national Learning Health System – one that incorporates evidence-based practices into routine care, captures new knowledge as part of the ongoing delivery of care, and then applies new knowledge in a timely manner.

Department History

The Department of Population Medicine (DPM; formerly the Department of Ambulatory Care and Prevention) is a unique research and academic partnership between Harvard Medical School (HMS) and Harvard Pilgrim Health Care (HPHC), a major teaching affiliate of the school. The Department was created in 1992 to establish an "academic health plan" focusing on research and education as they relate to the care of large defined populations, including individuals who do not seek out care. We are the nation's first medical school appointing department that is based in a health plan.

Organizational Relationships

The department is housed in the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Institute, a limited liability corporation of HPHC that includes DPM and the Office of Sponsored Programs. The Institute is governed by a Board of Managers that includes HPHC leadership, the HMS Dean for Academic and Clinical Affairs, and others. Dr. Richard Platt is both Department Chair and President of the HPHC Institute, reporting to the Dean for Academic and Clinical Affairs at HMS for academic matters and to the Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer at HPHC and the Institute's Board of Managers for organizational matters and engagement with the Health Plan.

Harvard Medical School

DPM is an appointing department of HMS. DPM faculty participate actively in the academic life of the medical school, leading core courses and other initiatives, serving on promotions committees, and participating in school-wide strategic planning. As a research and teaching department, DPM has no responsibilities for direct patient care. However, many clinician faculty members practice part time in a Harvard-related practice.

Harvard Pilgrim Health Care

HPHC is responsible for housing the Department and provides key management and administrative services. It supports DPM's academic mission by facilitating research involving its health plan members, contracted providers, and employer customers, and by permitting extensive use of its data systems.

Research

The Department uses its unique position within both a medical school and a health plan to conduct research that seeks to identify effective interventions and systems of care that can improve health care delivery, inform and enhance prevention efforts, evaluate and inform health care policy, and contribute to public health. DPM's research spans many axes: from prenatal care to palliative care; from primary care clinics to hospitals; and from preventive services to acute care to chronic illness management.

Research faculty and staff are organized into research clusters; faculty have ties to one or more clusters based on interests and expertise. Our primary areas of concentration include:

- Comparative effectiveness research
- Delivery systems-based research
- Prevention research
- Policy research
- Surveillance and public health research

Drawing upon these core research themes, DPM leverages several features to achieve our mission of improving population health. Some examples of research related to these themes include:

- Leadership roles in creation and use of large national distributed data networks that focus on using routinely collected electronic health data to support public health surveillance
- Assessment of the impact of insurance benefit design on access to care and utilization of services in HPHC, national commercial insurance plans, Medicare/Medicaid, and large insurance systems in other countries.
- Infectious diseases research and public health surveillance for community- and healthcare-associated infections and the use of large, pragmatic clinical trials to test strategies to prevent hospital infections.
- Pediatric health services research on vaccine safety, decision making and cost-effectiveness analysis, treatment and prevention of childhood infections, and asthma.
- Investigation of developmental and early life origins of health and disease, with a focus on obesity prevention.
- Pharmaceutical policy research on the impacts of cost containment strategies, benefit expansion, and programs to improve evidence-based prescribing, medication affordability, and patient adherence.
- Methodological research on a range of topics including design of distributed data systems, community antimicrobial resistance, safety surveillance, outbreak detection, chronic disease surveillance, and design of comparative effectiveness studies.

Teaching

The core mission of our Department also includes educational programs that leverage the Department's unique strengths to train medical students, residents, and health services researchers to improve the health of populations through clinical care, research, and delivery system and health policy leadership. All training experiences are informed by the health system and population perspectives of DPM and all faculty members teach in some capacity.

Teaching activities include:

- Leadership of Harvard Medical School's *Clinical Epidemiology and Population Health* 4-year longitudinal component, required for all medical students
- Residency Program in Primary Care and Population Medicine, in collaboration with Brigham and Women's Hospital and Atrius Health
- Fellowship in Health Policy and Insurance Research
- Harvard-wide Fellowships in Pediatric Health Services Research and General Internal Medicine
- Medicines and Insurance Coverage (MedIC) Initiative, which offers international courses to build global capacity to design, implement, and evaluate medicines benefit policies