

**Consortium on Law and Values in Health, Environment & the Life Sciences
Award Report for the 2016-17 Academic Year**

““Integrating a Fractured Healthcare System through Inter-organizational Networks:
A Study of Medicare Accountable Care Organizations”

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Project Summary

Using a network analytic approach grounded in sociology and organizational theory, my research examines the emergence and performance of Medicare Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) in the US healthcare system. Overall, my project aims to understand the extent to which these existing patterns of interaction among healthcare providers can explain the collective performance of these newly formed ACO networks. Considering the high level of investment by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) into the ACO program, the success (or failure) of these networks could have important implications for the trajectory of health system reform in the US.

Formed through provisions of the Affordable Care Act, ACOs are formal networks of healthcare providers, that is, they are contractual partnerships comprising many existing physicians’ practices, hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare delivery organizations. ACOs were formed to address one of the most important problems in our healthcare system: the fragmentation of care delivery. By providing financial incentives on top of the ethical argument that better coordination is better for patients, ACOs are designed to promote integration among ACO members without full integration into a single entity.

To study the financial and quality-related outcomes, I construct healthcare delivery networks using data that captures the physician-to-physician patient referral and co-treatment behavior for all Medicare patients. Using “Research Identifiable Files” acquired from the government through the Consortium funds, and other sources, I link these physician-level data to the organizations and ACOs that each doctor is affiliated with. I then use network analysis to characterize and analyze each networks’ properties and their changes over time, in order to assess their potential impact on overall performance.

Results

- **Academic progress:** *I successfully defended my dissertation proposal in November 2017, and am on track to complete my final defense in 2019.*
- **Publications:** *Two papers are under review (R&R) at Academy of Management Journal and Medical Care*
- **Presentations:** *Since the award, I have presented (or will shortly present) my work at the Organization Theory in Health Care Conference (2017, 2018), the Academy of Management (2017, Aug 2018), the Strategic Management Society (Sep 2018), and the INSEAD Network Evolution Conference (Oct 2018).*
- **Grant proposals:** *I received the Strategic Management Society’s Strategy Research Foundation Dissertation grant (2017-19).*

Future project plans

- ***Dissertation:*** *I expect to complete my dissertation and defend in Spring or Summer, 2019*
- ***Future research:*** *The work that is supported by the Consortium grant will directly lead to at least one additional journal submission in 2018/2019. Additionally, follow-on projects have been planned to further explore network performance through different research methods (e.g., experiments, simulations). I expect to continuously follow the performance of ACOs to update my data and investigate changes over time.*