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E&R SECTION SPONSORS STATISTICS SESSION AT SOA '10 HEALTH MEETING

By Vincent Kane

At the recent SOA '10 Health Meeting in Orlando, E&R Section Council members Margie Rosenberg and Joan Barrett led a highly participative workshop entitled "Statistics for Reading the Health Services and Policy Literature."

There were multiple objectives in designing this session. First, the session served to gently remind participants of all those statistics classes taken years ago, or perhaps content from early actuarial exams. Second, the session aimed to arm attendees with enough knowledge to more competently read the health services literature, thereby gaining greater awareness of today's statistical concepts and methods. To accomplish these objectives, the session was designed to review two peer-reviewed and published papers from both an actuarial and statistical perspective. However, the attendees became so engaged in the process that time allowed for a deep-dive into just one of the papers, "A Study of the Economic Impact of Bariatric Surgery," published in the *Journal of Managed Care* (2008).

In attendance at the session were over 30 participants affiliated with health plans, consulting firms and universities (not to mention members of the SOA research staff). Margie compared the structure and process of publishing in the health services research literature to more familiar actuarial journals such as the *NAAJ*. She then led a discussion on the paper's objective, which was to evaluate the private, third-party payer ROI for covering bariatric surgery. Such a study is challenging due to the fact that no randomized controlled trials were available, so statistical techniques such as matching algorithms were used. The paper utilized a time-dependent model structure; the model's coefficients were estimated based on a TOBIT approach. The ROI was developed using the estimated coefficients from the model.

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Attendees were so engrossed by the discussion of this paper that nobody realized the session had run 15 minutes over into the luncheon session! Based on the attendance and level of interaction at "Statistics for Reading the Health Services and Policy Literature," it is clear that future sessions or workshops covering this topic will be very successful. We look forward to attending such a session at future meetings!

Marjorie Rosenberg, PhD, FSA, MAAA, is a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) with a joint appointment in the School of Business, Department of Actuarial Science, Risk Management and Insurance, and in the School of Medical and Public Health, Department of Biostatistics and Medical Informatics. Her research interests are in the application of statistical methods to health care, and applying her actuarial expertise to cost and policy issues in health care. Margie was also the chair of the E&R Section Council for 2008-2009. She can be reached at mrosenberg@bus.wisc.edu.

Joan Barrett FSA, MAAA is a senior actuary at UnitedHealth Group, National Accounts, specializing in plan design and pricing and consumerism research. Joan was the chair of the E&R Section Council for 2009-2010. She can be reached at Joan_C_Barrett@uhc.com.

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