Sources of Information About Outreach Program Practices

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This *Milemarkers* bibliography includes selected references to outreach practices and research useful for locating children eligible for early intervention or preschool special education. Sources of information about outreach to physicians, outreach to hospitals, and community outreach are included. Sources about information on educational outreach (academic detailing) and the use of opinion leaders for conducting outreach activities are also included. The information should be useful for practitioners who have responsibility for conducting child-find activities.

The conduct of an outreach program that focuses on provision of information to primary referral sources and the early identification of children who are eligible for early intervention or preschool special education services is an explicit requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997). Primary referral sources include, but are not limited to, physicians, nurses, hospital personnel, Early Head Start and Head Start staff, childcare programs, *etc.* Outreach to these primary referral sources serves a number of functions, including child find and informing referral sources about the services available from early intervention and preschool special education programs.

A review of the outreach program literature finds that outreach program research and practice can be organized into several major, non-mutually exclusive categories: physician outreach, hospital outreach, community outreach, educational outreach (academic detailing), and opinion leader outreach. This *Milemarkers* includes selected references to research and practice in each of these categories that practitioners responsible for locating eligible children should find informative and useful for improving child find. Outreach program practices are one type of child-find activity (Dunst & Trivette, 2004) that constitutes the focus of research and practice at the Tracking, Referral and Assessment Center for Excellence (www.tracecenter.info).

Outreach Practices

Outreach to Physicians

Inasmuch as physicians and other health-care providers are primary sources of referrals to early intervention and preschool programs, outreach to physicians and other health-care providers constitutes one particular kind of child-find activity. According to Berman and

Melner (1992), outreach strategies such as the provision of information through mailings and newsletters, invitations to physicians to participate on early intervention or preschool special education program committees, and feedback to primary referral sources regarding referred children constitutes outreach efforts that can *keep* physicians and other health-care providers informed about early intervention and preschool special education programs. One key to the success of outreach to physician activities is regular and periodic contacts with these primary referral sources (e.g., Soumerai & Avorn, 1987).

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Outreach to Hospitals

Outreach to hospitals constitutes a second kind of child-find activity that can promote referrals to early intervention or preschool special education. The effectiveness of outreach to hospitals is increased markedly when outreach strategies capitalize on hospital staffs' preferred style of interacting with early intervention and preschool program personnel. According to Gilkerson, Gorski, and Panitz (1990), this typically includes brief, social exchanges providing feedback about families referred from an NICU or other hospital unit to an early childhood intervention program.

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Community Outreach

Community outreach to child-care programs, Early Head Start and Head Start programs, preschool programs, and other programs and organizations serving infants, toddlers, and preschoolers constitutes a third kind of child-find activity. Evidence indicates that collaborative efforts with these and other programs are more likely to result in the early identification of eligible children (Clayton, Lee, Buckelew, & Brindis, 2002; Kiger, 2003).

Community outreach also includes efforts to inform parents and other community members about the availability and benefits of early intervention, preschool special education, and other supports and services (Atkins, 1986). Efforts to improve awareness of early intervention and preschool special education, and referrals of eligible children, is most likely to be effective using a multifaceted approach to child find (O'Donnell & Giovannoni, 2000).

Atkins, M. (1986). The Welcome Baby program: A community-based volunteer prevention model of caring, sharing, and support for new parents. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 7*, 156-167.

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Educational Outreach (Academic Detailing)

Academic detailing is a one-to-one educational outreach practice characterized by specific principles and guidelines that have been shown to be associated with changing physician prescribing practices. The practice is characterized by brief, face-to-face educational outreach visits to physicians or other health-care providers by credible professionals (academic detailers) within physicians' practice settings to provide information and materials in order to change prescribing and referral practices (Soumerai & Avorn, 1990). An important characteristic of this outreach practice is follow-up visits after the initial educational outreach session (Valente & Rogers, 1995). Research by Soumerai and his colleagues consistently found that ongoing follow-up visits over extended periods of time are most effective in producing and sustaining desired change (Soumerai & Avorn, 1987).

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Opinion Leader Outreach

Opinion leaders are individuals trusted by their colleagues to evaluate new information and research and to assess the value of indicated practices in the context of local group norms (Greer, 1988). The influence of opinion leaders in the diffusion and adoption of new medical treatments has been recognized for almost half a century (Coleman, Katz, & Menzel, 1957; Rogers & Cartano, 1962). Opinion leaders often play an important role in educational outreach (academic detailing) practices and community outreach (Soumerai, 1998; Valente & Davis, 1999).

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Summary

Practitioners responsible for child find have at their disposal many options for conducting activities for locating infants, toddlers, and preschoolers eligible for early intervention or preschool special education. This *Milemarkers* included selected references to practice descriptions and research on the characteristics of outreach program activities found to be effective for informing primary referral sources about available services and for influencing changes in beliefs and attitudes toward the need for these services. The source material included in the bibliography should be useful to practitioners responsible for conducting child find.

Acknowledgements

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