

Why Research at KP?



Joseph Selby, MD

The impressive collection of Kaiser Permanente (KP)-generated research and implementation studies in women's health presented in this issue of *The Permanente Journal* suggests that many within our organization already understand why research in this area and in our settings is important. We start with the unique research opportunities created by the size of our membership and the integrated databases describing our members' health and health care. Motivation is increased by the realization that most KP members stay with KP for many years, providing a strong rationale for preventing the onset and progression of illness and for efforts to enhance patient understanding and satisfaction with care. Add to that the large numbers of researchers based in our regional research centers across the program who have dedicated their careers to understanding the biological and clinical factors that affect women's health and illness. To that, we add the rapidly growing numbers of clinicians and other clinical staff who have recognized that they can contribute to improving the care we deliver to women members through research, innovation, and evaluation.

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As you'll see, current research includes epidemiologic studies that aim to better understand the origins of various illnesses that are common in women, including breast and cervical cancer and gestational diabetes. Numerous examples of research evaluate KP innovations in areas such as perinatal substance abuse detection and prevention, and domestic violence prevention. Outcomes studies evaluate newer clinical interventions, including newer surgical methods and medications.

Increasingly, KP clinicians are participating in large clinical trials in this and other clinical areas, providing KP members opportunities to participate in cutting-edge science and possibly to benefit from experimental therapies. Clinical trials can also help our physicians keep up to date with the newest thinking in their

fields and can enhance KP's image as a provider of the highest-quality care. At this point, the relevant question may have shifted from "Why research at KP?" to "Why not more research at KP?" Whether we can successfully build an even more prominent research enterprise will depend on how KP organizes and deploys its resources to support research and the individuals conducting that research. ♦

Joseph Selby, MD, is a family physician and the director of KP Division of Research. He serves as a lecturer in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at UCSF School of Medicine. He has been with the Division of Research since 1985 and serving as director since 1998. E-mail: joe.selby@kp.org.