Members Present: Marc Drezner, Susan Goelzer, Paul Moberg, Rick Moss, Greg Nycz, Tom Oliver, Rod Welch

Members Absent: Betty Chewning, Norm Drinkwater, Craig Kent, Robert Lemanske, Pat McBride, Pat Remington

Guests: Tim Baker, Mike Fiore

Staff: Cathy Frey, Tonya Mathison, Ken Mount, Dick Reynolds, Eileen Smith, Karla Thompson

1. **Call meeting to order**

Moss called the meeting to order at 5:05pm.

2. **Announcements**

   **Nycz appointed to NIH Director's Council of Public Representatives**

   Moss congratulated Greg Nycz who was recently appointed to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director’s Council of Public Representatives (COPR). The COPR is a federal advisory committee comprised of members of the public who advise the NIH Director on issues related to public input and participation in NIH activities, the NIH research priority setting process, and public outreach programs and efforts. Nycz will provide updates to MERC on the council’s activities.

   **Collaborative Health Sciences Program (CHSP)**

   Expert reviewers have completed independent evaluations of the seven CHSP full applications. The reviewers met as a full committee on October 19 and developed a ranked list of the applications which will be forwarded to MERC in December 2009 for selection of finalists to be interviewed in January 2010.

   **Symposium on New Governance for Health System Change**

   Oliver provided an overview of the *Symposium on New Governance for Health System Change* which took place on October 9, 2009. The MERC-supported symposium brought together scholars from the United States and the European Union in the fields of health services research, clinical medicine, political science, public affairs, law and social work to examine how new forms of regulation and governance affect the prospects for health systems change and improvement. The dialogue focused on clinical and translational research and on the system-level structures and policies that facilitate or inhibit health system improvement and population health outcomes.
3. Approval of October 12, 2009 draft minutes

Nycz moved approval of the draft October 12, 2009 minutes. Welch seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

4. Oversight and Advisory Committee report

Nycz provided an overview of the October 21, 2009 OAC meeting. It was reported that over 180 individuals, including Mayor Tom Barrett and Commissioner of Health Bevan Baker, attended an event held by the UW Foundation at the Discovery World Museum on September 17, 2009. The event highlighted the School’s efforts in Milwaukee with a focus on the Lifecourse Initiative for Healthy Families (LIHF).

Following the release of the LIHF Community Action Planning Grant Request for Proposals on September 21, four Convening Planning Agencies submitted notices of intent on behalf of their respective targeted communities: Milwaukee, Beloit, Kenosha and Racine. All of the applicants will be invited to submit a Community Action Planning Grant in January 2010.

Bill Oemichen, Executive Director of the Cooperative Network, provided an update on the concluded 2004 implementation grant, Co-op Care. Co-op Care created a viable health insurance model for agribusiness and other rural groups in Wisconsin with the establishment of the Farmers’ Heath Cooperative of Wisconsin (FHCW). Since its inception in 2007, FHCW has organized ten regional health insurance cooperatives offering affordable, quality health insurance to agricultural producers.

The meeting concluded with consideration of draft general principles for the WPP endowment growth and distributions. There was general agreement by OAC to add a principle on maintaining transparency of its policies, procedures and processes in order to ensure effective and prudent management of the funds.

5. Final report presentation on The Wisconsin Smokers’ Health Studies

Mike Fiore, MD, MPH, MBA, presented the final report for the 2006 targeted grant, The Wisconsin Smokers’ Health Studies. These studies, supported by a National Institute for Drug Abuse center grant to the UW Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (UW CTRI), make up the largest smoking cessation trial ever undertaken nationally to address the long-term health and psychosocial effects of smoking and quitting. MERC’s grant supported expanding the number of smokers being followed to 2,600 and increasing the time period for follow-up to three years, enriching the information about the health and health system consequences of successful or non-successful quitting.
Discussion and decision by MERC on acceptance of report

Smith presented the written evaluation of the final report by McBride and Remington. The reviewers agreed that Dr. Fiore was highly successful in achieving the recruitment and data collection goals for the project. Dr. Fiore met the project’s translational goals by working with primary care clinics resulting in a high impact factor on clinical care and population health. The reviewers noted that papers are being published, including a paper that was very well publicized on most effective smoking cessation treatments.

Of particular interest to MERC was that UW CTRI recently received a new P-50 center grant from the National Cancer Institute; only two of the seven NIH funded Tobacco Centers received this competitive award. Oliver made a motion to accept the report. Moberg seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

6. Financial planning: Update on MERC’s projected 2009-2010 budget status

Mount presented the financial projections for the WPP through October 2009. The projected value of the endowment is $292.5 million. MERC will continue its strategic discussions on the endowment growth and distributions in December 2009.

7. Staged transfer of Master of Public Health Program from MERC to School of Medicine and Public Health

Moss reported that support of the Master of Public Health Program (MPH) budget is being transferred from MERC to the School over the next two years with 2/3 of the total budget covered by MERC in 2009-10, 1/3 covered by MERC in 2010-11, and then the MPH will be fully funded by the School starting fiscal year 2011-12. Overall, the MPH budget was reduced by 10% to match reductions made by the School to other programs. There was general agreement by MERC to this staged transfer of the MPH budget.

8. Review of Collaborative Health Sciences Program (CHSP) progress and final reports

Linking Aging, Resveratrol and Sirtuins

Moss and Welch provided an overview of the final report for John Denu’s 2007 CHSP grant, Linking Aging, Resveratrol and Sirtuins. The reviewers agreed that Dr. Denu made excellent progress toward the completion of the three aims of this project, which are dedicated to studies of the mechanisms of beneficial effects of calorie restriction or resveratrol ingestion, although in several instances the analysis of data is ongoing and specific conclusions have yet to be made. The work provided the basis for three publications in preparation and will form the basis for a NIH grant application. Welch moved acceptance of the report. Nycz seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.
Wisconsin Childhood Lead Levels and Educational Outcomes

Nycz provided an overview of the interim report for Marty Kanarek’s 2008 CHSP grant, *Wisconsin Childhood Lead Levels and Educational Outcomes*. Although the report raised several questions and concerns, the reviewers agreed that Dr. Kanarek has made acceptable progress in planning and administrative tasks necessary for success of this important project in future years.

Drezner moved deferring acceptance of the report with a request that Dr. Kanarek provide a written response to the following questions raised by the reviewers:

- What is the sample size loss likely to be due to the reduction in funding and what is the impact on needed power for analyses and inferences? What are the implications of this for the success of his project? How many cases and controls are anticipated?
- Are there any data elements that might be dropped or other budget cuts that could be considered in order to afford getting the original sample size of cases and controls estimated as needed for the project goal and research question?
- How does the PI plan to recruit an adequate sample size without information from DPI on the current school attended by each child? What is the back-up plan for achieving the sample enrollment?
- Provide additional information on the overage payment for a key position on the project that has been outstanding since December 2008. To what key position does this overage apply and what reason is there for the extensive delay?

The motion was unanimously approved following a second by Moberg. Dr. Kanarek’s written response will be discussed at a future MERC meeting.

Closing the Gap on Pediatric Health Disparities: Discerning the Causes and Consequences of Iron Deficiency in Infancy

Drezner provided an overview of the interim report for Pamela Kling’s 2008 CHSP grant, *Closing the Gap on Pediatric Health Disparities: Discerning the Causes and Consequences of Iron Deficiency in Infancy*. Although the report raised several questions and concerns, the reviewers agreed that Dr. Kling has made acceptable progress.

Drezner moved deferring acceptance of the report with a request that Dr. Kling provide a written response for discussion with a small group of MERC members, including the two reviewers, addressing the following questions:

- What is the impact on the study of the poor retention of study subjects at 6 and 12 months of age? What improvement in retention is expected following institution of in-home blood drawing? How will the reduced numbers of subjects influence the PI’s ability to complete each of the aims. Also, provide figures on the retention rate.
- In more detail, what is the progress made related to extraction of RNA from blood samples?
- What substrates are under testing as interfering agents for the zinc protoporphyrin/heme ratio?
- Since the lead study coordinator recently left the project, please describe the responsibilities of this position and how those will be addressed with current or new personnel.

The motion was unanimously approved following a second by Welch. Dr. Kling’s written response will be discussed at a future MERC meeting.

9. **Adjourn – Next meeting December 14, 2009**

Moss adjourned the meeting at 6:45pm.

Recorder, Tonya Mathison