

NORC News

NORC and Office of Energetics researchers win at Public Health Research and Practice Day

April 18, 2016

[Nutrition Obesity Research Center \(NORC\)](#) [1] and [Office of Energetics](#) [2] researchers distinguished themselves at the recent [8th Annual Public Health Research and Practice Day](#) [3], which gives visibility to ongoing and planned research activities ranging from completed research to concepts of research projects. Abstracts were scored on clarity, the significance of the research, and the scientific approach to the problem.



[Madeline Jeansonne, MPH](#) [4], program manager in the Office of Energetics, was awarded 2nd place in the Faculty Staff Category for “The Randomization to Randomization Method: An Application with Caffeine,” which was a proof-of-concept study for a novel RCT design, the Randomization to Randomization (R2R) method. R2R was developed to capture potential interactions between expectancies and treatment, which no current RCT design can do without deceiving participants. To do this, subjects’ expectations about treatment (caffeine vs. placebo pills) were manipulated by randomly assigning them to a probability of receiving the caffeine pills and revealing this probability to them. After pill consumption, subjects underwent mood and vigilance testing. Results suggest that the R2R design is feasible and capable of detecting treatment by expectancy interactions without deceiving participants. Moreover, failing to account for possible interactions between treatment and expectancy could lead to misleading results, as treatment effects may differ between traditional RCT conditions (subjects are told they have a 50 percent chance of receiving the active treatment) and actual conditions of use (patient is certain his doctor has prescribed the active treatment). UAB co-investigators are Mariel A. Parman, MPH, research assistant in the [School of Medicine](#) [5]; [Adeniyi J. Idigo, MPH](#), [6] research assistant, and [Brandon J. George, PhD](#) [7], statistician, in the Office of Energetics; [Kevin R. Fontaine, PhD](#) [8], professor and chair in the [Department of Health Behavior](#) [2] and NORC; [Gareth R. Dutton, PhD](#) [9],

associate professor in the [Division of Preventive Medicine](#) [10] and NORC; [Taraneh Soleymani, MD](#) [11], assistant professor in the [Department of Nutrition Sciences](#) [12]; and [David B. Allison, PhD](#) [13], distinguished professor and director of the NORC and Office of Energetics.



[Patrice L. Capers, PhD, MSCR](#) [14], a MERIT post-doctoral scholar in the NORC and Office of Energetics, was awarded 2nd place in the Post Doctoral Category for “Disparities in the Quality of Obesity-Related Research,” which aimed to develop and evaluate an automated method to examine research quality using crowdsourcing (e.g., Mechanical Turk). The team sampled 500 random titles and abstracts, and then had microworkers (MW) review the titles and abstracts using expert rating as the gold standard (GS). They found that there was high percent agreement between GS and MW when identifying randomized controlled trials and less agreement when identifying other interventions. The researchers concluded that while greater distinction between study designs is needed for future analysis, crowdsourcing is a feasible method to evaluate research quality. Co-investigators [Andrew W. Brown, PhD](#) [15], scientist in the NORC and Office of Energetics; [Joseph S. Thornton](#) [16], student assistant in the Office of Energetics; [Kathryn A. Kaiser, PhD](#) [17], instructor in the NORC and Office of Energetics; [TaShauna U. Goldsby, PhD](#) [18], postdoctoral fellow in the NORC and Office of Energetics; and David B. Allison, PhD, distinguished professor and director of the NORC and Office of Energetics.

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