Comparisons of the 2007 and 2010 Research Administrator Stress Perception Surveys

Introduction
The Research Administrator Stress Perception Surveys (RASPerS) were conducted in 2007 and 2010. During the interval between 2007 and 2010, there was significant change in the research funding landscape with an end to the U.S. National Institutes of Health budget doubling and the downturn in the U.S. economy. With decreased research funding and state dollars, many research institutions were forced to reduce staffing in research administration. Added to that, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act created a need for rapid responses to apply for grant dollars followed by extremely labor intensive reporting requirements. As shown in Figure 1, the 2010 RASPerS data show that research administrators report their jobs have become more and more demanding over the past few years.

Objectives
The purpose of this study is to compare the results of the 2007 and 2010 RASPerS to see the possible impact of the events affecting the research administration community during this time span. This will be done by comparing data from the two studies in the areas of level of perceived work stress (PWS), working in excess of 40 hours per week, reporting to work when sick, work/family life balance, and feeling valued by colleagues.

Limitations
The 2007 RASPerS was designed specifically for use with the research administrator population. The 2010 RASPerS used general population survey instruments which were validated for the research administration population. Thus while the questions were similar and measured the same factors, they were not identical.

Methods
Sampling and collection methodology for the original surveys is previously described (Shambrook & Brawman-Mintzer, 2007; Shambrook, 2010). Questions were selected from each survey to compare the variables of interest.

Results
Binary outcomes were observed for each question of 2007 and 2010 surveys respectively. Response rates for each question were estimated corresponding to years 2007 and 2010. The test for difference of proportions was done in StatSoft 8 to explore if there was a significant change in the questions when answered in year 2007 and 2010. Approximate 95% confidence intervals for difference of proportions between 2010 and 2007 were obtained from StatSoft 8 using the method of Miettinen and Nurminen (1985).

Table 1: Statistical analysis of the 2007 and 2010 Research Administrator Stress Perception Surveys. All factors show change between years at high levels of significance. (N varies)

Factors from RASPerS 2007 & 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estimated Response Rate</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived level of stress extremely high</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.0014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel highly appreciated and respected at work</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workplace presenteeism (working when sick)</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/family life balance difficulties</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate resources to work 40 hour work-week</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Results from RASPerS 2007 & 2010

Conclusions
Almost 90% of the respondents in the 2010 RASPerS reported their work had become more demanding over the past few years (Fig. 1). Data comparison from the 2007 and 2010 RASPerS show that a higher percentage of research administrators are experiencing extremely high levels of perceived work stress (Fig. 2). A higher level of research administrators are also routinely reporting to work when sick (Fig. 4) and are experiencing difficulty with work/family life balance (Fig. 5). A lower percentage of research administrators have sufficient resources at work to enable them to hold to a 40 hour work-week (Fig. 6). The positive news is that there are also a higher percentage of research administrators reporting that they are feeling appreciated by their colleagues (Fig. 3). All findings were statistically significant (Table 1).

While work has become more demanding over the past few years for research administrators, this is accompanied by higher levels of perceived appreciation and respect by colleagues.

References