

Virginia Commonwealth University Health System Postdoctoral Training Program in Clinical Health Psychology

An American Psychological Association Accredited Postdoctoral Specialty Practice Program



Program Synopsis

Benefits of the Program to Fellows: The VCU Health System Postdoctoral Training Program in Clinical Health Psychology was developed to provide advanced specialty training to graduates of APA accredited doctoral programs and internships in professional psychology. Fellows are selected for excellence in generalist mental health background as well as for knowledge and experience in health psychology in either or both research and clinical service. The program prepares fellows for careers as clinical health psychology specialists, recognizing the important role that clinical practitioners have to play in informing and shaping relevant clinical research.

Benefits of the Program to the VCUHS: This program was developed in part to provide increased psychological services in the areas designated for strategic initiatives by the health system. In particular, cardiology and cardiac surgery, oncology and transplantation are areas of strength for the health system. The skills of psychologists in helping patients to develop improved health behaviors, to adapt to the psychological demands of serious chronic medical problems, and to assisting other health professionals in caring for their patients were identified as an underserved need. In addition, many of these programs rely on the participation of psychologists in maintaining accreditation as Centers of Excellence for insurance and outside credentialing programs such as those of the United Network for Organ Sharing. The fellows also provide some limited services with VCU's nationally recognized Center of Excellence in Weight Loss Surgery.

This postdoctoral fellowship program is also consistent with the mission of the VCU Health System to educate health practitioners in providing the highest standards of evidence-based care.

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Definition: Clinical Health Psychology is the specialty that applies scientific knowledge of the inter-relationships among behavioral, emotional, cognitive, social and biological components in health and disease to the promotion and maintenance of health; the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of illness and disability; and the improvement of the health care system. It is dedicated to the development of knowledge regarding the interface between behavior and health, and to the delivery of high quality services based on that knowledge to individuals, families, and health care systems.

Duties of the Fellows: Fellows provide clinical and liaison services within the designated programs, with a focus on patient assessment, short-term patient, family, and group interventions, and participation in team patient care planning. At a minimum, they provide twenty hours of direct patient care services weekly.

Educational Program: The fellows receive a minimum of two hours of individual face-to-face supervision weekly. They participate in daily rounds with faculty. They attend and present at the Department of Psychiatry's Grand Rounds series. They attend and present at the weekly literature seminar (journal club) in the Division of Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry. They attend a weekly educational conference in transplantation and other educational programs provided by other departments as appropriate. They attend a weekly seminar in clinical health psychology. Diversity issues are emphasized in all training venues. The fellows also participate in all required education and training for the Health System.

The fellows increase their knowledge of the scientific basis for the practice of clinical health psychology and apply this knowledge in daily clinical practice, helping them to develop more specialized skills beyond the mental health practice skills developed during graduate education and internship training. They also develop in-depth knowledge of specific medical conditions and treatment regimens to better interact with colleagues in medicine, surgery and other health care disciplines. This experience provides a prototype for their ability to work with these or other medical populations and practitioners in the future.

Program History: VCU and the VCU Health System have been educating postdoctoral fellows in clinical health psychology since 1990. Until the development of this program, most of these fellows were supported by NIH research grants with occasional contributions from the Health System. The fellows provided many clinical services both in the context of research and also in areas of identified need in order to help the fellows meet the standards for licensing. Past fellows have gone on to positions in government (one served for a time in the White House), in medical education and as principal investigators on NIH grants in health psychology, and as health care providers in public and private practice settings. This program admitted its first class of two fellows in 2005. It has a primary clinical focus with a practitioner-scientist model, training fellows to be discerning consumers of research and to be aware of contributions they may make as clinicians to translational science.

2007-2008 Fellows

Melanie Bean, Ph.D. received her doctorate from Virginia Commonwealth University. She completed an internship at the Southwest Consortium, New Mexico Veterans Affairs Hospital, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Dr. Bean has expertise in childhood obesity and motivational therapy.

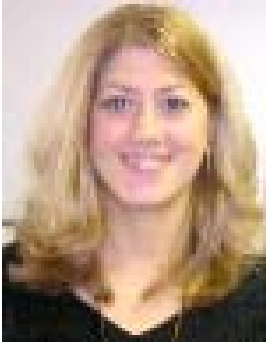
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Solam Tsang Huey, Ph.D. is a graduate of Drexel University. She completed her internship at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. Dr. Huey has expertise in working with patients who are living with HIV and cancer patients.

The Virginia Commonwealth University Health System is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer. Men, women, minorities and persons with disabilities are encouraged to apply.

2006-2007 Fellows



Kristin Kuntz, Ph.D. received her doctorate from Ohio State University. She completed her internship at the University of Florida. Dr. Kuntz has a strong interest in working with patients with heart disease. During her fellowship she worked with cardiology, cardiac surgery, liver transplant surgery, the bone marrow transplant program and the weight loss surgery program. Dr. Kuntz is currently Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at Ohio State University and Director of Psychosocial Services for the Ohio State University Transplant Programs.



Stella Nelms, Ph.D. received her doctorate from the University of Texas at Austin. She completed her internship at the Temple Texas VA Medical Center. Dr. Nelms is interested in a variety of medical populations, including pain patients and patients coping with gender identity issues. During her fellowship, Dr. Nelms worked with the liver transplant program, on the burn unit, and with the weight loss surgery program. Dr. Nelms has joined the VA Medical Center in Hampton, Virginia developing and providing integrated medical, mental health and rehabilitation home care services for elderly veterans.

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2005-2006 Fellows



Jill Ascari, Ph.D. received her doctorate from Virginia Commonwealth University. She completed her internship at the University of North Carolina Medical Center in Chapel Hill. During her fellowship, Dr. Ascari worked with the liver transplant program and with the weight loss surgery program. She has joined a private practice group in Richmond and works with St. Mary's Hospital to provide psychological services for their weight loss surgery program. She is licensed to practice clinical psychology in Virginia and is Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at VCU.



Elyse Kaplan, Psy.D. received her doctorate from Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland. She completed her internship at the Salem VA Medical Center. During her fellowship, Dr. Kaplan worked with cardiology, cardiac surgery, the burn unit and the weight loss surgery program. Currently she is employed as a clinical health psychologist at Chase Brexton Health Services in Baltimore, a clinic serving HIV patients and other underserved medical populations. She is licensed to practice clinical psychology in Virginia and Maryland.

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Primary Faculty

Robert P. Hart, Ph.D., ABPP, Chairman, Division of Clinical Psychology, Professor of Psychiatry, Neurology and Neurosurgery, has administrative responsibility for the program and teaches in his specialty of clinical neuropsychology with special emphasis on the assessment of patients from the strategic areas.



Mary Ellen Olbrisch, Ph.D., ABPP, Director of Education and Training in Clinical Health Psychology, Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Surgery, oversees this program and supervises the fellows in evaluation and treatment of Weight Loss Surgery patients. She spent more than twenty years with the VCU Organ Transplant Programs and continues to work with the liver transplant program in living donor evaluation, another experience offered to the fellows. She rounds with the fellows several days each week.



James P. Culbert, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Child Neurology, is a clinical child neuropsychologist and an adult clinical health psychologist who provides supervision and other educational experiences to the fellows. He offers an elective experience on the burn unit. Areas of expertise included clinical hypnosis, biofeedback, and behavior therapy.



Douglas P. Gibson, Psy.D., MPH, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, is an adult clinical health psychologist who had more than ten years experience in community health psychology practice before joining our faculty in 2005. He has particular expertise in evaluating and treating patients with chronic pain, including pre-surgical screening evaluation. Currently he works with the transplant programs, cardiology and oncology (especially the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit) and with other medical specialties that refer an increasing number of patients as they have become aware of the increased availability of psychological services.



Other Administrative Faculty

James L. Levenson, M.D., Chairman, Division of Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry, Professor of Medicine, Psychiatry and Surgery is an internationally renowned clinician and scholar in consultation-liaison psychiatry and psychosomatic medicine. He is chairman of the Medical College of Virginia Hospital Ethics Committee. Dr. Levenson interacts with our fellows at seminars and conferences and provides limited clinical supervision within the program.



Joel J. Silverman, M.D., Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry, James Asa Shields Professor of Psychiatry, founded the Division of Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry for the VCU Health System. Dr. Silverman is a powerful advocate for the mentally ill and for the importance of integrating the disciplines of psychiatry, psychology, and social work in the care of the medically ill. He actively promoted the development of this program by the VCU Health System and the Department of Psychiatry.