

VA Center for Integrated Healthcare

Post-Doctoral Fellowship Description

Syracuse, New York

Description

The VA Center for Integrated Healthcare (CIH) is home to a VA Office of Academic Affiliations-sponsored postdoctoral psychology fellowship in Clinical Psychology as a member of VA's Advanced Fellowship Program in Mental Illness Research and Treatment (MIRECC). This 2-year program is designed to prepare psychologists to become outstanding clinical researchers and practitioners in the area of Primary Care Mental Health Integration (PC-MHI).

Research training goals include building an individual research portfolio in PC-MHI while enhancing technical skills necessary to conduct applied research. Fellows are encouraged to collaborate with senior staff and peers in developing research proposals, conducting IRB-approved research, and preparing and submitting grant proposals. Manuscript preparation and publication in peer-reviewed journals is also required. Opportunities are available to collaborate and receive feedback on manuscript drafts, and to attend and present at academic conferences. In addition, opportunities exist to serve on committees and as scientific peer reviewers for local research and development office(s) as well as scholarly journals. Individual mentoring, biostatistical consultation, and research assistant support are made available to fellows.

Clinical training goals focus on co-located collaborative care in an integrated primary care clinic. This aspect of training is designed to promote fellows' abilities to identify and address a wide range of behavioral and mental health concerns that may impact Veterans of all ages in primary care settings. Areas of skill development include working with medical providers in a collaborative fashion, and enhancing abilities as a member of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary teams.

In addition to direct service delivery, fellows are also encouraged to participate in clinical program development and evaluation activities, to include quality improvement initiatives and the development and implementation of educational offerings for psychology practicum students, pre-doctoral interns, and other providers. Opportunities for teaching (e.g., guest lectures, webinars) may be available at times. In addition to the research and clinical training provided on-site at the Center for Integrated Healthcare, training and professional development opportunities are also available through the fellowship program's Hub Site. Fellows participate in monthly teleconferences which highlight recent developments in

psychological and psychiatric research, and are encouraged to participate in manuscript and grant-writing groups as well as biostatistical tutorials. Staff at the Hub Site are also available by appointment to facilitate other aspects of professional development, such as refining CVs and providing consultation in other areas.

*This postdoctoral program meets state licensure requirements.

**APPIC Member #9214

***Please note that this program is non-accredited.

Program Philosophy

The Psychology Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Center for Integrated Healthcare and affiliated with the Syracuse VA Medical Center offers early career psychologists traditional training in professional clinical research and clinical psychology. This training program follows a scientist-practitioner model.

Since 2004, the Center for Integrated Healthcare has strived to improve the quality of Veterans' health care by supporting the implementation of Primary Care-Mental Health Integration (PC-MHI). Our center strives to enhance knowledge, practice, and competencies in PC-MHI specifically by:

- Developing and evaluating the efficacy and effectiveness of interventions for mental and behavioral health symptoms and disorders that are highly prevalent among Veterans in Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT).
- Advancing the understanding of the process of delivery of integrated mental and behavioral health treatment and prevention services in PACT.
- Identifying and evaluating effective strategies to promote the implementation of evidence-based PC-MHI services.
- Supporting national implementation of PC-MHI as required by the UMHS Handbook through education, training, clinical consultation, technical assistance, and program implementation activities.
- Identifying and disseminating evidence-based mental and behavioral health interventions feasible in PACT settings.
- Training predoctoral and postdoctoral students in clinical research and clinical service delivery on integrated behavioral health prevention and treatment services in PACT.

Training Structure

Our program adheres to the overarching mandate of VA's Advanced Fellowship Program in Mental Illness Research and Treatment (MIRECC)—to train psychologists to become leading clinical researchers in high priorities of Veteran mental health. However, the primary purpose is to prepare fellows for successful entry into or entry-level professional positions, particularly in Medical Center, academic and public sector health care settings. This eventual expected outcome rests on two primary goals of the training program: 1) the development of intermediate to advanced skills in core competencies of primary care research and primary care psychology, and 2) the further development of advanced competencies in a focused area of PC-MHI practice of particular interest to the individual trainee (e.g., postdeployment health, detection of dementia, brief interventions for anxiety). These goals are achieved through supervised experience in clinical research, direct patient care, and didactics nested within a scientist-practitioner model.

Over the course of this 2-year program, fellows will spend the majority of their time conducting clinical research. At minimum 25% of their time will be protected for dedicated clinical rotations and clinical supervision. In addition, a proportion of fellows' research time may include work on clinical research activities that involve direct service delivery (e.g., work as a clinical interventionist on research studies), and up to 3 hours per week on activities that involve supervision (e.g., supervision of research assistants and/or practicum students). A minimum of four hours of weekly research and clinical supervision are provided in individual and group formats. Formal evaluations occur at least twice per year. Our program emphasizes the assessment and treatment of mental and behavioral health concerns that commonly occur in the VA's integrated primary care settings, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and alcohol misuse. The majority of research and clinical training will address these areas. A sample training plan is available below.

Similar to other Medical Center employees, fellows are scheduled to work a 40-hour week (typically 8:00am to 4:30pm), with 30 minutes for lunch. Per VA policy, full time trainees are given credit for 2,080 hours of training for each complete year. The program may be extended for a third year to further develop advanced competencies in clinical research. Application for a third year of funding is competitive, requiring approval from the Office of Academic Affiliations. For more details, please visit the [Advanced MIRECC/CoE Fellowship Website](#)

| Training Activity | Sample Activities & Weekly Time Allocation | |
|---|--|------------|
| Clinical Research and Related Activities (Approximately 75% Commitment) | Clinical research (including research that involves direct service delivery), e.g.: * Design and execute research studies (e.g., pilot intervention study, medical record/ big data); * Work as a clinical interventionist on a randomized controlled trial; * Data collection, management, and analysis; * Regulatory compliance activities/ record-keeping; * Training in research methods; * Grant-writing and manuscript preparation; * Conference presentations; * Consultation with affiliate researchers | ≤20 hours* |
| | Providing supervision of research assistants/ practicum students | ≤ 3 hours* |
| | Receiving research supervision (individual, group, coaching) and didactics | 3-4 hours |
| | Meetings, administrative tasks, <i>ad hoc</i> organizational activities | 1-3 hours |
| Protected Clinical Time (At minimum, 25% Commitment) | Providing direct clinical care | 8 hours |
| | Receiving clinical supervision (individual, group) | 2 hours |

*Clinical research time commitments may vary based on individualized training plans (e.g., not all Fellows will supervise students throughout the year)

Research Training

Research training comprises approximately 75% of fellowship activities, and focuses primarily upon issues germane to primary care-mental health. During protected time for patient-oriented research, Fellows will:

- Develop awareness of pressing clinical /research priorities within VA.
- Develop skills in grant writing.
- Learn to navigate the landscape of career development awards.
- Develop advanced skills in mental health research methodology and statistical analyses; scientific writing and presentation; and research ethics in mental health research, in order to understand the best evidence-based approach to clinical research and treatment.
- Be provided with structured didactics that address an array of topics ranging from advanced research methodologies, and professional writing, and research ethics.

Fellows are also encouraged to participate in local opportunities for formal presentation of their clinical research findings.

CIH investigators research areas such as assessment and treatment of depression, PTSD, alcohol misuse and pain management, and the detection of cognitive impairment in the primary care setting. Fellows collaborate with research mentors to develop a research training plan and their own research project(s). Early goals typically include developing an initial research proposal and obtaining IRB approval for a first year project. Fellows often will collaborate with their research supervisor(s) on his/ her/ their ongoing projects as well. Over the course of the training period, fellows will collect and analyze data, present results at national meetings, and prepare at least two manuscripts for publication. At least one of these should be a first-authored publication. Opportunities also exist to co-author papers with other CIH mentors and research staff. As fellows develop their research and writing skills, they also will begin to draft, and ultimately aim to submit, a grant application in their area of interest as it pertains to primary care-mental health integration.

Biostatistical consultation is available via CIH and MIRECC Fellowship Hub Site staff. Formal research supervision is provided by the fellow's research mentor at weekly meetings. These meetings serve as an opportunity to discuss research ideas, progress, and challenges. Informal supervision will be provided via other meetings and communication as well, and as requested by the fellow. Other supervisory contact is available via workgroups and at specific research project/ team meetings. Feedback on grant submissions, ideas, and progress is available via monthly research meetings and also through the Hub Site.

Supervisor and adjunct faculty biographies and research activities are available here: [Supervisor & Adjunct Faculty Information](#)

Clinical Training

At minimum 25% of fellows' time will be protected for dedicated clinical rotations and clinical supervision. The focus of clinical training is on the integration of mental health services in VA primary care, and delivery of brief, evidence-based services to Veterans of all age groups. We emphasize the development of general and advanced clinical competencies and also offer additional training for the development of specific skills within the area of primary care- mental health integration.

Clinical services are provided in an integrated VA primary care clinic (required). Primary care-mental health appointments tend to be brief (20-30 minutes) and focused on assessment, provision of time-limited services (typically 1-4 appointments), and triage to specialty care if needed.

Clinical supervision is provided by a clinical psychologist from the Syracuse VA Medical Center.

Sample Goals

| | Year 1 | Year 2 |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in monthly research meetings, gain exposure to grant applications and structure • Collaborate with research mentor on mentor's project(s) • Begin to develop individual research goals • Prepare first IRB application and begin collecting data • Collaborate on one clinical database study • Prepare an outline for a review paper • Submit at least one manuscript for publication • Prepare pilot grant proposal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in monthly research meetings • Attend & present at one scientific conference such as Collaborative Family Healthcare Association Conference or a VA research conference • Complete pilot grant or other independent research study • Complete review paper • Submit at least one data-based manuscript for publication • Prepare application for a mentored VA Career Development Award |
| Clinical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shadow primary care and behavioral health providers, begin seeing patients • Become familiar with PC-MHI literature, brief assessments, and clinical practices • Become familiar with interdisciplinary team-based assessment and intervention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine PC-MHI clinical practice skills |
| Professional Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare and revise a biosketch, teaching philosophy, and research statement • Prepare for EPPP • Contribute to VAWNY psychology intern seminar • Consider application for VA Psychology Training Council's Multicultural Diversity Committee • Attend at least one scientific conference such as Collaborative Family Healthcare Association Conference or a VA research conference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete EPPP and prepare for psychology licensure • Contribute to VAWNY psychology intern seminar • Consider application for VA Psychology Training Council's Multicultural Diversity Committee • Search for, select, and secure full-time employment, preferably with the Department of Veterans Affairs |

Eligibility & Application

Prospective applicants must be U.S. Citizens, and have completed doctoral degree requirements from an APA, CPA, or PCSAS-accredited program in clinical or counseling psychology, and an APA, CPA, or PCSAS-accredited pre-doctoral psychology internship. Individuals from diverse backgrounds are encouraged to apply. Verification of citizenship, selective service status, and appropriate vaccinations is required prior to appointment by VA policy. Please note that VA employees, including trainees, are now required to show proof of COVID vaccination or an authorized exception. For additional information on eligibility requirements for all VA psychology training programs, please visit the [VA Psychology Training homepage](#). Following appointment, trainees are also subject to federal drug testing policies, which may be reviewed [here](#). For an eligibility checklist, please visit the following page: [Am I Eligible? Checklist for VA HPTs](#)

The Center for Integrated Healthcare is committed to seeking and sustaining a culturally and ethnically diverse work environment. The training program adheres to, and makes available to all interested parties, formal written policies and procedures that govern resident selection, internship and academic preparation requirements, administration and financial assistance, resident performance evaluation and feedback, advisement, retention, termination, due process and grievance redress for residents and training supervisors. The training program complies with other VA policies and procedures that pertain to supervisors' and residents' rights, responsibilities, and personal development. The United States Government does not discriminate in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), national origin, political affiliation, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, genetic information, age, membership in an employee organization, retaliation, parental status, military service, or other non-merit factor.

To apply, please submit applications through the APPACAS portal. Complete applications must include:

- Cover Letter/Letter of Intent. The letter should clearly describe how your career goals and interests are aligned with the fellowship training opportunities, and identify specific mentor(s) you would be interested in working with.
- Detailed vitae describing background training and experience, description of internship, and other scholarly activity and research.
- Two Writing Samples. Please include both a scholarly work sample and de-identified clinical case report.
- Three letters of recommendation from previous supervisors. One letter must be from the Director of Training of your APA, CPA, or PCSAS-accredited pre-doctoral internship. Letters should be submitted by your supervisors on your behalf. Please do not submit more than three letters.
- Official graduate transcript sent directly by your university. Unofficial transcripts are acceptable for upload in the application portal until official transcripts arrive at our offices (see mailing address below).

Applications for the upcoming training year are due by December 1st.

Additional instructions and our current recruitment flyer are available for download on our webpage. The 2023 training year salary range is: \$52,005 (Year 1), \$54,515 (Year 2), \$57,025 (Year 3).

Health Professions Trainees (HPTs) are appointed as temporary employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs. As such, HPTs are subject to laws, policies, and guidelines posted for VA staff members. There are infrequent times in which this guidance can change during a training year which may create new requirements or responsibilities for HPTs. If employment requirements change during the course of a training year, HPTs will be notified of the change and impact as soon as possible and options provided. The VA Training Director for your profession will provide you with the information you need to understand the requirement and reasons for the requirement in a timely manner.

Advanced MIRECC/CoE Fellowship Overview

For more details, please visit the [Advanced MIRECC/CoE Fellowship Website](#)