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

Program Synopsis

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.

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. A practitioner-scientist model of training has been adopted. Fellows are encouraged to develop collegial relationships with faculty, who provide supervision through role-modeling, consultation and mentoring.
**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. In addition, fellows are encouraged to participate in clinical health psychology research and other scholarly activities with faculty members. Fellows also have a teaching role, giving presentations and supervising medical students, graduate students and others in various activities.

**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.

**Program Outcomes:** Eleven fellows have graduated from our program, and all fellows who started the program completed it. All of our fellows achieved their goals in the clinical arena through focused work with specific medical populations and through participation as active members of multidisciplinary health care teams. All fellows who completed the program passed a mini-ABPP oral exam demonstrating clinical skills and competence through explication of written work samples, analysis of novel clinical cases, and assessment of ethical and professional knowledge. All have demonstrated competencies in assessment and intervention based on daily evaluation of clinical work and reports by experienced supervisors. All fellows have participated in research or writing projects resulting in articles or chapters prepared and submitted for publication or presentation. All fellows have demonstrated presentation skills through delivery of a grand rounds presentation and in-service teaching to various medical services and nursing units. All of our graduated fellows are licensed to practice psychology in one or more states. Our fellows have all started careers in clinical health psychology in various settings, including private practice, the Veterans Administration Health System, multidisciplinary community medical clinics, and academic medical centers. The program conducts an annual review so that fellows can provide input for the ongoing improvement of the program. Fellows have expressed satisfaction with the training offered and have reported favorably on achieving individual as well as program goals. Fellows keep a diversity log during the course of the year, and these logs reflect the opportunity to provide services to a very diverse
patient population with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, educational level, socioeconomic status and age.

**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, transplantation and bariatric surgery 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. 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.

Regarding Our Accreditation Status: For various reasons, we chose to voluntarily withdraw our program from accreditation by the American Psychological Association at the end of the 2011-2012 training year. We cannot predict when we will again apply for accreditation of this program and what changes we will make before doing so. Applicants should take this into consideration in applying to this program. If you desire further information, you may contact the Commission on Accreditation, American Psychological Association 750 First St. NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242 1-202-336-5679, apaaccred@apa.org
To apply:

The Department of Psychiatry at Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center invites applications for a postdoctoral fellowship in clinical health psychology within the Divisions of Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology beginning 9-1-2013. We seek qualified applicants who are excited by the opportunity to develop advanced clinical skills and obtain research experience in areas that include cardiology, organ transplantation, obesity and weight loss surgery and other areas. Versatility, the ability to interact effectively with others and the ability to develop liaison relationships in more than one area of health care are necessary. Applicants must have completed or be nearing completion of an APA-accredited Ph.D. or Psy.D. program, including an APA-accredited internship, preferably within a medical setting. Previous clinical and research experience in health psychology and behavioral medicine is highly desirable. Stipend is currently $40,000 and cost of individual or family health insurance is covered on par with other Health System residents and employees. The VCU Medical Center is located in the heart of Richmond, a historic city with a mild climate and a moderate cost of living. More information is available at

[http://www.vcu.edu/psych/education/HealthPsychologyFellowship.pdf](http://www.vcu.edu/psych/education/HealthPsychologyFellowship.pdf). To apply, send an application package including a letter of interest, curriculum vita, two brief (no longer than five pages) adult clinical health psychology/behavioral medicine work samples, one demonstrating skills in assessment and one in intervention, a quantitative summary of your assessment and treatment experience covering traditional mental health practice, health psychology practice and substance abuse/addiction practice, and three letters of recommendation to: Mary Ellen Olbrisch, Ph.D., ABPP, Health Psychology Training Program Director, Department of Psychiatry, Virginia Commonwealth University, Box 980268 VCU, Richmond, VA 23298-0268. If using delivery service other than U.S. Mail, send to Dr. Olbrisch at VCU Medical Center, West Hospital, Room 8112, 1200 East Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219. You may contact Dr. Olbrisch at molbrisch@mcvh-vcu.edu. Applications should be submitted to Dr. Olbrisch both electronically and by mail. Applications will be reviewed beginning January 10, 2013 and should not be submitted before January 1, 2013. Starting date for these positions is September 1, 2014. Virginia Commonwealth University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer and encourages applications from minorities and persons with disabilities.

For more information, contact: Mary Ellen Olbrisch, Ph.D., ABPP
Director of Education and Training in Clinical Health Psychology
Box 980268 VCU Medical Center
Richmond, VA 23298-0268
804-827-0053
email: molbrisch@mcvh-vcu.edu
2013-2014 Fellow

Lauren King, Psy.D. received her doctorate in clinical psychology from the Florida Institute of Technology. She completed her Clinical Psychology internship at the Eastern Virginia Medical Center in Norfolk. Dr. King has expertise in psychological measurement and personality assessment, particularly with the MMPI-2 and is experienced in collaborative care in the primary care setting. During her fellowship, she will be working with cardiology and cardiac surgery, organ transplant, weight loss surgery, and the gastroenterology/hepatology program for patients with non-alcoholic steatohepatitis.

2012-2013 Fellow

Rebecca Aycock, Ph.D. received her doctorate in Counseling Psychology from the University of Memphis. She completed her internship at the VA Medical Center in St. Louis Missouri. Dr. Aycock has broad interest in clinical health psychology, including work in preventive care and sexual health. During her fellowship, she worked with cardiology and cardiac surgery, organ transplant, weight loss surgery, and the gastroenterology/hepatology program for patients with non-alcoholic steatohepatitis. Dr, Aycock has taken a position with Piedmont Geriatric Hospital as a psychologist work with patients who have complex combinations of physical and mental health problems.

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2011-2012 Fellow

**Marie LePage, Ph.D.** received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Kent State University. She completed her Clinical Psychology Internship at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. Dr. LePage has expertise in the area of eating disorders and she is strongly interested in a teaching career. During her fellowship, she worked with cardiology and cardiac surgery, organ transplant, weight loss surgery, and the gastroenterology/hepatology program for patients with non-alcoholic steatohepatitis. Dr. LePage is currently Assistant Professor of Psychology at Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

2010-2011 Fellow

**Karen E. Stewart, Ph.D.** received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond Virginia. She completed an internship in Health Psychology at the Rush University Medical Center in Chicago Illinois. Dr. Stewart has expertise in behavioral weight loss therapies and she has special interest in health behavior change interventions and using psychoneuroimmunology based models to evaluate mediators of the relation between psychological well being and health status. During her fellowship she worked with the gastroenterology and hepatology specialty programs in inflammatory bowel disease and non-alcoholic steatohepatitis. She also consulted to the gastrointestinal surgery clinic and worked with the liver transplant program. Dr. Stewart is currently Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at VCU.

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2009-2010 Fellow

Michelle Emrich, Psy.D. received her doctorate from Spalding University in Louisville Kentucky. She completed an internship at the Salem VA Medical Center. Dr. Emrich has expertise in diabetes self-management and she has special interest in medically underserved populations. During her fellowship she worked with the liver and cardiac transplant programs and with the weight loss surgery program. She took a position in primary care health psychology with the Tacoma Washington VA Puget Sound Health Care Center following her fellowship and is currently with the Richmond VA Medical Center.

2008-2009 Fellow

Jennifer Jones Cameron, Ph.D. received her doctorate from The University of Alabama at Birmingham. She completed an internship at the West Virginia University School of Medicine in Charleston. Dr. Cameron has expertise in working with patients living with heart disease. During her fellowship, Dr. Cameron worked primarily with the cardiology, cardiac surgery, and weight loss surgery programs. Dr. Cameron is working at the McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond as a psychologist in the primary care clinics.

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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. During her fellowship, Dr. Bean worked primarily with the cardiology, cardiac surgery, bone marrow transplant and weight loss surgery programs. Following her fellowship, Dr. Bean began her career as Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry at Virginia Commonwealth University.

**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. During her fellowship, Dr. Huey worked primarily with the liver transplant program and with the weight loss surgery program. Dr. Huey is now a health psychologist in the primary care program at the Bronx VA, where she is responsible for developing an integrated care program for the veterans who obtain their primary care through that medical center.

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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. Following her fellowship Dr. Nelms joined the VA Medical Center in Hampton, Virginia developing and providing integrated medical, mental health and rehabilitation home care services for elderly veterans. Currently Dr. Nelms is employed with the Palliative Care program at the Atlanta VA Medical Center.

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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. Following her fellowship, Dr. Kaplan took a position 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. Currently, Dr. Kaplan is working with Department of Defense in 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, 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.

**Stephan R. Weinland, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, is an adult clinical health psychologist with primary responsibilities in the cardiology and hepatology transplant services. Additional clinical and research interests of Dr. Weinland are the treatment of functional GI disorders as well as quality of life in patients who receive advanced cardiac therapies. Dr. Weinland rounds with fellows and practicum students and supervises clinical service provision to transplant and advanced cardiac therapy patients.

**Karen E. Stewart, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, is an adult clinical health psychologist with expertise in the treatment of obesity. Dr. Stewart provides clinical and liaison services to programs in gastroenterology and hepatology with focus on patients who suffer from non-alcoholic steatohepatitis, a potentially fatal liver disease linked to obesity. She supervises the fellows in a number of clinical activities.

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.