



**Virginia Commonwealth University
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 have daily interaction 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 didactic and case conference series for psychology trainees working in academic medical settings that meets three times per month. 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-based patient care and planning. At a minimum, they provide twenty hours of direct patient care services weekly. Weekly opportunities for didactic education are available across multiple settings in the health system and fellows are given time to engage with them. In addition, fellows are encouraged to participate in clinical health psychology research and other scholarly activities with faculty members as mentors and supervisors. Fellows also have a teaching role, giving presentations and supervising graduate students across the spectrum of health service provision.

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, 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 as presently constituted has admitted one fellow for each of the last nine years. The department has been continuously training clinical health psychology fellows since 2005, although we made some changes in 2014 due to changes in personnel and program emphasis. The program has a primary clinical focus with a practitioner-scientist model, training fellows to be practitioners and discerning consumers of research while being aware of contributions they have the ability make as clinicians to translational science.

Postdoctoral Residency Admissions, Support, and Initial Placement Data

Program Admissions: We seek qualified applicants who are excited by the opportunity to develop advanced clinical skills and obtain research experience in a selection of areas that include organ transplantation, mechanical circulatory support, obesity and weight loss surgery, trauma surgery and burn surgery, primary care, smoking cessation, pain management 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 doctoral 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.

Program Support: The current salary for our postdoctoral fellow is \$47,476 and cost of individual or family health insurance is covered on par with other Health System residents and employees. Domestic partner coverage if not legally married is not available. Fellows

are given 15 days of paid annual leave, and are eligible for up to 20 consecutive days of paid sick leave and up to 5 days of professional leave. Fellows are not entitled to Family Medical Leave but may use a limited amount of annual leave for family medical issues. The program is committed to working with fellows to accommodate individual circumstances. The program also provides limited travel support to fellows who present their research at professional meetings or conferences during the fellowship year.

Program Outcomes: Eight fellows have graduated from our program as currently constructed, and ten fellows graduated from an earlier program that we transitioned from with a change of faculty in 2012. All fellows who started the program completed it. All of our graduated 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, chapters, or posters prepared and submitted for publication or presentation. All fellows have demonstrated presentation skills through delivery of a Psychiatry Grand Rounds presentation, an article presentation at Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry journal club, and a case presentation for the Health/Rehab Psychology didactic and case conference series, as well as in-service teaching to various medical services and/or nursing units. Fellows keep a diversity log during the course of the year, and these logs reflect the opportunity to provide services to very diverse patient populations with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, educational level, socioeconomic status and age.

Initial Placement of Graduated Fellows: 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.

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, bariatric surgery and trauma 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.

Our program is accredited by the American Psychological Association. If you desire further information, you may contact the Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation, American Psychological Association 750 First St. NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242 1-202-336-5979, 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 9-1-2022. We seek qualified applicants who are excited by the opportunity to develop advanced clinical skills and obtain research experience in areas that include organ transplantation, mechanical circulatory support, obesity and weight loss surgery primary care, smoking cessation, 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 doctoral 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 \$47,476 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 Virginia, a historic city with a mild climate and a moderate cost of living. More information is available at:

<http://psych.vcu.edu/Portals/37/PDFs/HealthPsychologypostdoc2020.pdf>.

To apply, submit the following materials electronically to the APPIC postdoctoral portal (APPA CAS): 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, substance abuse/addiction or primary care practice if available, and three letters of recommendation. You may contact Dr. Islam at leila.islam@vcuhealth.org with any questions. *Applications will be reviewed beginning in early December and interviews will begin by early January.* **Starting date for this position is September 1, 2022.** Virginia Commonwealth University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer and encourages applications from minorities and persons with disabilities.

For more information, contact: Leila Z. Islam, Ph.D.
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2020-2021 Fellow



Anna-Leigh Powell, Psy.D. received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Mercer University. She completed internship at Indiana University School of Medicine on the Adult/Health track. Dr. Powell's primary clinical interests are psychological adjustment to medical illnesses, especially end-stage-organ disease, and lifestyle interventions for behavioral health. Following fellowship, she accepted a position at VCU Health to continue working with the transplant and bariatric surgery teams, providing pre-surgical assessment and post-surgical intervention and currently works with out fellows.

2019-2020 Fellow



C. Caroline Merz, Ph.D. graduated from Princeton University with Honors in Psychology. She earned a Master's and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Washington University in St. Louis, where she was a recipient of a T32 federal training grant from the National Institute on Aging, and was awarded the Lichtenberg Scholarship in Geropsychology. Dr. Merz completed her predoctoral Clinical Internship at the Veteran's Affairs Medical Center in Washington DC, and gained specialized training in Clinical Health Psychology through completion of an APA-Accredited Postdoctoral Fellowship at Virginia Commonwealth University. At VCU, Caroline provides clinical services for inpatient trauma and burn surgery, organ transplant, bariatric surgery, primary care psychology, and maintains a half-day outpatient behavioral medicine clinic. Dr. Merz has published numerous scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals, and has co-authored two book chapters. She currently works in private practice in the Charlottesville, VA area.

2018-2019 Fellow



Krystal Morgan, Ph.D., (nee Trout) received her doctorate in Clinical Health Psychology from East Carolina University in Greenville, NC. She completed her internship in Clinical Psychology at the University of Washington Medical Center and Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, WA, within the Behavioral Medicine/ Neuropsychology track and with focus on rehabilitation psychology and inpatient consultation. Dr. Trout completed original research for her dissertation on fatigue and quality of life in pediatric sickle cell disease. Dr. Trout worked with multiple medical populations while on fellowship, including trauma and burn surgery patients, organ transplant, bariatric surgical patients, and integrated primary care. She has accepted a position at UNC Hospital in Chapel Hill, NC as a Clinical Psychologist in the Abdominal Transplant Program following completion of her fellowship.

2016-2018 Fellow



Therese Cash, Ph.D. received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University and completed an internship in Clinical Psychology at the McGuire Veterans Administration Health Center in Richmond. Dr. Cash completed a novel dissertation on the topic of hyperacusis. Dr. Cash suspended her fellowship while Dr. Weinland was deployed to the Middle East in 2017 to assume a staff position covering many of his clinical duties. She resumed and completed her role as an advanced fellow in March 2018 and currently works as a psychologist in St. Louis, MO.

2015-2016 Fellow



Haley Kutner, Ph.D. received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Yeshiva University in New York and completed an internship in Clinical Psychology at Eastern Virginia Medical School, with clinical concentrations in integrated primary care, eating disorders, and family systems therapy. Over the course of her clinical training, Dr. Kutner has worked extensively with adult and pediatric medical patients, providing both individual and family based interventions to address psychological and behavioral factors related to chronic illness. Dr. Kutner accepted a position on the faculty at Duke University following her fellowship, but has returned to Richmond and is working in private practice.

2014-2015 Fellow



Ebony Vinson, Ph.D. received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the University of Kentucky. She completed an internship in Clinical psychology the Federal Correctional Institute in Tallahassee, Florida. Dr. Vinson is interested in sociocultural factors in health and the impact of spiritual practices in health and health promotion. Additionally, she has a special interest in multiculturalism and underserved medical populations. She worked at the VCU Student Counseling Center on the Medical campus following her fellowship and currently is a clinical health psychologist with the Gulf Coast VA Medical Center in Biloxi, Mississippi.

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. Dr. King's first position was as a clinical health psychologist with the Sentara RMH Medical Center in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Currently she is in private practice in northern Virginia.

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. Dr. Aycock is currently a staff psychologist with the Maguire VA Medical Center in Richmond, VA.

Primary Faculty



Rashelle B. Hayes, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychiatry, has conducted clinical research and provided clinical services to patients with a focus on either smoking cessation or weight management counseling. Her research interests are in the development of novel and theoretical tobacco cessation or weight management interventions, as well as in the development and training of interventions in behavioral health counseling for the physicians and medical students. Dr. Hayes also has expertise in health disparities research in tobacco control and is a member of the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers. Clinically, at VCU, Dr. Hayes has primary responsibilities in Bariatric Surgery, Internal Medicine, and the Outpatient Behavioral Medicine Clinic.



Leila Z. Islam, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Director of Training in the Clinical Health Psychology Fellowship, is an adult clinical health psychologist who specializes in behavioral medicine and integrated/team-based health care, allowing her to work collaboratively with physicians and other health care providers on a number of health conditions, such as: obesity, diabetes, sleep problems, substance use, tobacco use cessation, liver disease, disease prevention, and health promotion. Her clinical research has focused on physical activity as an adjunct to established treatments, particularly for SUDs; tobacco cessation; interprofessional education; gender differences in screening/interventions/outcomes; and technology applications to improve health outcomes. Dr. Islam also has expertise in motivational interviewing and medical education at both the undergraduate and graduate level. She provides clinical services and training opportunities through Bariatric Surgery, Internal Medicine (Primary Care and Weight Management), and the Outpatient Behavioral Medicine Clinic.



Kathryn E. Maher, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, is a clinical health psychologist with primary responsibilities in the VCU Trauma Surgery and Evans Haynes-Burn Center. Dr. Maher has experience working both with pediatric and adult populations. Her primary area of clinical interest is consultation/liaison work with medical inpatient populations with a focus on behavioral health. Further, Dr. Maher has initiated PTSD/Depression screening of trauma/burn inpatients. Dr. Maher recently started a Trauma Psychology outpatient clinic that will serve as a bridge for trauma/burn inpatients after acute inpatient hospitalization. Dr. Maher teaches about trauma within our program and is a primary supervisor in the fellowship.



Stephan R. Weinland, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Surgery, Interim Director of Clinical Health Psychology Services at VCU Medical Center, is an adult clinical health psychologist with primary responsibilities in the cardiology, hepatology and nephrology transplant services. Additional clinical and research interests of Dr. Weinland are the treatment of functional GI disorders as well as substance use and screening for substance use in transplant settings. Dr. Weinland rounds with fellows and practicum students and supervises clinical service provision to transplant and advanced cardiac therapy patients. Dr. Weinland was deployed to the Middle East with the Army for most of 2017 and returned to VCU in early 2018; he was again deployed in 202 to help states combat COVID-19.



James B. Wade, Ph.D., ABPP, Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology, is a clinical neuropsychologist with expertise in chronic pain, hepatic encephalopathy, and other aspects of chronic liver disease, and with family issues in health psychology. Dr. Wade is frequently called upon to give testimony in civil proceedings and teaches about expert witness testimony and other issues within the program. Fellows have the ability to gain some experience with neuropsychological assessment during their fellowship year.

Other Faculty



Mary Ellen Olbrisch, Ph.D., ABPP, Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry, has overseen this program and has supervised the fellows in evaluation and treatment of Weight Loss Surgery patients even in retirement. She spent more than twenty years with the VCU Organ Transplant Programs. Dr. Olbrisch retired from her position on the faculty at VCU effective January 1, 2017 but continues to practice as a member of MCV physicians and continues to offer supervision to the fellows. In the coming year she will be devoting several days weekly to research on test development for clinical health psychology.



James L. Levenson, M.D., Chairman, Division of Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry, Rhona Arenstein Professor of Psychiatry 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.



Robert Findling, M.D., MBA. Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry, joined us from Johns Hopkins University, where he was director of the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, vice chair in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, and as the Leonard and Helen R. Stulman Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. He also served as the vice president for Psychiatry Services and Research at the Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore, Maryland, as well as the inaugural Lead Medical Director for Integrated Behavioral Services at Johns Hopkins Medicine. In January 2020, Dr. Findling returned to his medical school *alma mater* and became the chair of the VCU School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry as well as a C. Kenneth and Dianne Wright Distinguished Chair in Clinical & Translational Research. Dr. Findling takes an active role without trainees throughout the department and interacts with our fellows through departmental meetings.