

Psychology Externship Program

The Washington VA Medical Center (VAMC) is a state-of-the-art facility located in Washington, D.C., N.W., and is accredited by the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). This site also houses our APA accredited internship within the Mental Health Service. We are dedicated to providing high quality, comprehensive care to veterans.

Depending on availability, externs are able to work with veterans exhibiting substance dependence, mood and anxiety disorders, serious mental illness, chronic pain, and traumatic brain injury. Depending on availability and extern interest, externs will be able to perform individual therapy, group therapy, triage and intake assessments, assessment and cognitive rehabilitation for traumatic brain injury.

Supervision

Staff utilizes a variety of theoretical approaches including: evidence-based, cognitive-behavioral; motivational enhancement; and systems based problem-solving. Externs receive supervision by licensed clinical psychologists in clinical interviewing and assessment skills, developing treatment recommendations and plans, providing a range of therapeutic services, and consulting in a multi-disciplinary team setting. Supervision time will vary based on the skill level and needs of the extern, as well as requirements of the various doctoral programs.

Terms

We offer formal externships for the academic year. Externships can start in the summer or fall, and can last through the spring semester of the academic year depending on the needs of the extern, clinical programs, and supervision availability. Most supervisors prefer that practicum students **begin in the summer and continue through the academic year**. We don't have a summer externship program.

Stipend

None

Basic requirements to apply

Applicants should be in good standing with their academic institutions and should be from an APA accredited, doctoral degree program in clinical or counseling psychology. We cannot accept students who are in terminal, master's degree programs even if the program is accredited by CACREP. We can only accept U.S. citizens in our training programs.

Application procedure

You should select one rotation which interests you. We ask applicants to specify only one rotation due to the large number of applications we need to review. Please send a brief cover letter and curriculum vitae to me at slavomir.zapata@va.gov. You must apply by email. Please do not send letters of recommendation or sample treatment reports unless a staff member specifically requests one or both of them. **You will be contacted by email or phone if a staff member decides to conduct an interview.** Please submit your application by February 24. All applications will be acknowledged.

Selection Decisions

We are only able to accept a limited number of students from a very large group of qualified candidates. Selection decisions will be made once all interviews have been completed. Applicants who have been interviewed will be notified no later than March 10, if they have been selected for a position.

Available Rotations

- Community Living Center
- Geriatric outpatient BHIP team
- Health Psychology
- Home Based Primary Care
- Mental Health Clinic
- Neuropsychology
- Pain Clinic
- Polytrauma Psychology
- Psychosocial Rehabilitation Recovery Center
- Women's Primary Health Care
- Substance Abuse
- Trauma Services

Community Living Center

This rotation provides a variety of training opportunities with the geriatric and rehabilitation population, including adults of all ages. It is primarily a therapy rotation with some assessment. The Veterans served by the CLC are either receiving rehabilitation or are residing in Long-Term Care or Palliative Care/Hospice Care. Externs participate as members of a comprehensive interdisciplinary team. As a member of the team, the extern would assist the supervising psychologist in providing direct patient care, including initial and "as needed" evaluations on all Veterans admitted to CLC, as well as individual and group therapy as appropriate. Assessments generally include conducting clinical interviews and administration of screening measures to identify levels of cognitive and psychological functioning, and providing feedback to the Veteran and his or her family, as well as at weekly gero-psychiatry and interdisciplinary team meetings. Interventions provided by the extern may include various cognitive-behavioral interventions such as relaxation training, pain management, assertiveness training, cognitive restructuring, couples therapy, and behavioral modification. Targets of interventions range from assisting in adjustment to a medical condition and/or loss of independence, to estrangement from family and friends and end-of-life issues. Many opportunities exist to learn about differential diagnoses regarding medically versus psychologically-related mental and emotional states. There is the opportunity to co-facilitate an existing PTSD group, and/or to develop group therapy with a different focus, such as pain management or a family support group.

Health Psychology

This rotation is intended for externs at any level of training in health psychology, from beginner to highly-experienced. The health psychology rotation is unique in that it combines experiences in multiple settings and programs at the medical center. Externs will have the opportunity to gain experience working with Veterans who have a wide

range of psychological disorders and physical illnesses. The health psychology program has a formal presence in the infectious disease clinic, the renal dialysis clinic, the oncology department, the low vision clinic, the health improvement program (HIP) and the MOVE! program. HIP is an outpatient program that serves Veterans with serious mental illness and co-morbid medical problems. MOVE! (a national weight management program) utilizes the psychology service to provide cognitive and behavioral interventions for patients who may be experiencing changes in mood, such as depression, as a result of their health concerns and chronic medical conditions. Externs will also have the opportunity to provide group and individual therapy, psychoeducation, intake evaluations, and mental health clearance evaluations for patients undergoing organ transplants, interferon treatment, and bariatric surgery. The rotation includes opportunities for consultation with other providers, supervision of practicum students, and participation in multidisciplinary team meetings. A major goal of the rotation is for externs to appreciate how cognitive and behavioral interventions can be used for patients with co-morbid mental health and medical problems. Externs will have the opportunity to collaborate with psychologists, psychiatrists and other medical specialists, social workers, nurses, recreational therapists, vocational specialists, and dietitians.

Home Based Primary Care (HBPC)

HBPC serves Veterans whose physical health and/or mobility significantly limits their ability to come to the hospital/clinics for medical care. Externs function as part of a small, cohesive multidisciplinary team that travels to the Veteran's place of residence to provide services. Under supervision of a licensed psychologist, externs provide direct patient care, serve as a mental health consultant to the team, and contribute to treatment planning. Interventions include but are not limited to: 1) Screening, assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health conditions, particularly depressive and anxiety-related disorders, adjustment disorders, and dementia; 2) Individual psychotherapy to support Veterans coping with grief and loss associated with disability and other life transitions; 3) Behavioral medicine interventions for pain, disability, sleep problems, smoking cessation, and medical compliance; 4) Assessment of suicidality and dangerousness, providing treatment and/or coordinating referral as needed; 5) Cognitive screening to address specific functional questions and/or to coordinate referral for neuropsychological evaluation; 6) Psycho-education and support of the Veteran, spouse, family members/caregivers, and others who play an important role in keeping the Veteran at home. In short, the HBPC rotation permits an extern to implement a wide variety of diagnostic and therapeutic interventions as part of a close-knit team who truly values the contribution of psychology. This rotation also provides the option to work with individuals with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) as part of the twice-monthly half-day ALS clinic on campus.

Mental Health Clinic

The Mental Health Clinic (MHC) is a multidisciplinary program that provides outpatient medical, psychiatric, and social work services to Veterans. Externs in the mental health clinic will have the opportunity to provide individual and group psychotherapy to Veterans with various psychological concerns (e.g. mood disorders, psychotic disorders, adjustment disorders, and trauma-related issues). The main training goal of

this rotation is to prepare externs to learn appropriate interventions in order to treat individuals with the broad range of psychological disorders typically encountered in a multi-disciplinary outpatient mental health clinic. Evidence-based psychotherapies and a recovery model are emphasized. Supervision by one of three psychologists will be available to externs in this rotation.

Neuropsychology

This rotation is intended for externs at any level of training in neuropsychology, from beginner to highly-experienced. Training will be tailored to meet the needs and interests of the extern. On this rotation, externs will be trained in all aspects of neuropsychological evaluation, including: clinical interviewing, test administration, test scoring, interpretation, and report write-up. A flexible battery approach is used with test selection based on referral issue and age of patient. Externs will primarily conduct outpatient evaluations but will likely have opportunities to conduct inpatient evaluations as well. Externs will also be trained in neuropsychological consultation to other medical professionals and will take part in multidisciplinary team meetings. Opportunities exist to attend neurology grand rounds, brain cuttings, and other relevant didactics. Opportunities for training in neurocognitive rehabilitation also exist (see polytrauma rotation). The goal of this rotation is to provide externs with well-rounded training in all aspects of neuropsychological evaluation and consultation.

Pain Clinic

This rotation is available to students at any level of training in pain psychology. The Pain Clinic is a multidisciplinary, specialty clinic within the Department of Neurology serving Veterans with complex cases of chronic/intractable pain. There are a multiple opportunities available including biopsychosocial evaluation, group therapy, couples therapy, and individual therapy. A variety of treatment modalities are utilized including, but not limited to, cognitive behavioral therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, motivational interviewing, and biofeedback. Externs will have the opportunity to work with Veterans who present with a variety of mental health concerns including comorbid substance abuse disorders, mood and anxiety disorders, psychosis, and Axis II disorders. There is a focus on program development, and externs therefore have the opportunity to develop interventions based on their interests and the needs of the clinic. Externs also serve an important consultative role within weekly multidisciplinary team meetings, and have the opportunity to present cases and recommendations to providers within neurology, pharmacy, physical medicine and rehabilitation, and nursing.

Polytrauma Psychology

As a Polytrauma Network Site, DC VAMC provides specialized services to Veterans who have sustained injuries to multiple organ systems, often including a traumatic brain injury. This rotation is intended for externs at any level of training - from beginner to highly experienced – who are interested in learning techniques of neurocognitive rehabilitation with Veterans adjusting to disability and/or co-morbid PTSD. Training opportunities include co-leading groups, such as a psychoeducational group or problem-solving, as well as conducting individual therapy. Externs may also conduct individual assessments by clinical interviewing. Externs may also conduct

psychological and neuropsychological assessments to provide diagnostic clarification and guide treatment planning.

Psychosocial Rehabilitation Recovery Center (PRRC)

The Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) is an outpatient, multidisciplinary treatment program that provides mental health services for veterans who present with a wide range of psychiatric illnesses. These include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other anxiety disorders; schizophrenia; mood disorders, including major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder; and personality disorders. Many veterans who receive treatment in the PRRC also have co-morbid substance abuse disorders. PRRC programming implements a recovery model to help veterans recover from their mental illness, so they are able to become fully functioning members of their communities. Externs primarily provide group and individual psychotherapy and participate in multidisciplinary treatment team meetings. Group therapy provided by the extern may include dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), cognitive training, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), anger management, grief and loss, and social skills training. However, externs have the opportunity to initiate and develop groups depending on interest and need. In individual therapy, externs are trained to provide interventions from a variety of therapeutic approaches, including CBT, ACT, cognitive processing therapy for PTSD, interpersonal therapy (IPT), and motivational interviewing.

Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program (SARP)

SARP is an outpatient drug treatment program that uses a multidisciplinary team to treat Veterans with alcohol and drug addictions. Externs provide individual therapy, conduct assessment, and participate in multidisciplinary team meetings. Externs have the opportunity to co-lead groups including a CBT/Depression group. The main training goal is to prepare externs to treat alcoholism and drug addiction in a multidisciplinary setting.

Trauma Services Program

The Trauma Services Program (TSP) is an outpatient clinic that provides treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to men and women veterans. This practicum experience is intended for advanced level trainees (previous experience in clinical therapy settings necessary). The clinic provides group, individual, and family therapy, focal evaluations for post-traumatic stress disorder, and psychodiagnostic evaluations. While many veterans in TSP served in combat, we treat veterans with a variety of military-related traumatic experiences including, but not limited to, military sexual trauma, training accidents and motor vehicle accidents. Training opportunities may include providing individual therapy, couples education and/or therapy, co-leading groups, and conducting individual assessments (clinical interview). The opportunity may also involve programmatic evaluation/management opportunities.