Rehabilitation Research Fellowship
Polytrauma and Traumatic Brain Injury Research at the DC VA Medical Center
Frequently Asked Questions

Description:
The Polytrauma and Traumatic Brain Injury Rehabilitation Research Fellowship (P/TBI Fellowship) is based at the Washington DC VA Medical Center (DC VAMC) in partnership with Georgetown University, the National Rehabilitation Hospital (NRH), and the Georgetown-Howard Universities Center for Clinical and Translational Science. This post-doctoral rehabilitation research fellowship has tracks for:

1) Clinical Specialists – a one-year fellowship for licensed physical therapists (25% research; 75% clinical)
2) Clinician-Investigators – a two-year fellowship for licensed physical therapists (75% research; 25% clinical)
3) Rehabilitation Scientists – a two-year fellowship for those with training in movement science, bioengineering, or other rehabilitation science disciplines (100% research).

What is the application and approval process?
The P/TBI Fellowship is funded by the VA Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA) in association with the VA Office of Research – Rehabilitation R&D Service, and applications are sponsored by the host VA medical center.

The application process broadly includes a general review of one’s qualifications and research interests, followed by the full submission of the fellowship objectives, learning plan, and fellowship project.

Step 1: INITIAL INQUIRY
Due date: Rolling basis
Initial inquiries about the program may be submitted via e-mail with an accompanying curriculum vitae or resume. E-mail communication may be directed to Michael.Harris-Love@va.gov or Joel.Scholten@va.gov. The objectives of this early communication include:

- Determining if an applicant meets the basic program requirements
  - US citizenship
  - A conferred doctorate
  - A current PT license (for Clinical Specialist and Clinician-Investigator tracks ONLY)
- Understanding the applicant’s research topic of interest
- Providing the applicant with basic information about potential mentors and potential fellowship projects.

Telephone interviews may be arranged with Program Leadership and potential research mentors after the review of the initial inquiry and curriculum vitae/resume. The Program Leadership will personally work with each applicant to ensure that they find the best mentor based on mutual research interests. Qualified applicants that establish a mutual match with a research mentor and identify a proposed fellowship project topic will proceed to Step 2: The Pre-Application Phase.
Step 2: PRE-APPLICATION
Due date: March 1st
Qualified applicants with a proposed mentor match and fellowship project will work with Program Leadership to submit the Pre-Application for approval by the P/TBI Fellowship Program Advisory Board. The elements of the Pre-Application include the following:

Fellowship Applicant
Applicants will submit, 1) a letter of intent and, 2) a NIH Biosketch. The elements of the letter of intent are as follows (*Note: ‘Section A’ of the Biosketch may be used for the letter of intent):

- Summarize your research background (and clinical interests, if appropriate)
- Highlight the strengths that you bring to the fellowship
- Identify the line of study or specific question that you would like to pursue with your project
- List the additional skills that you hope to acquire during your post-doctoral training
- Explore your next career step after the fellowship.

A link to the current NIH Biosketch form can be found on this webpage: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/biosketchsample.docx

Proposed Research Mentor
Identified research mentors will provide, 1) a 1-2 page fellowship project synopsis (this may be written with the applicant), and 2) a NIH Biosketch.

The P/TBI Fellowship Program Advisory Board will review the applicants each academic year. Approved applicants will be internally ranked based on their academic/professional background, potential fit with a given mentor/project, and candidate availability. Applicants will be informed of their status within one week of the Advisory Board vote. Advisory Board approval is required for the DC VAMC to formally sponsor candidates and initiate the credentialing and security clearance process at the medical center.

Step 3: APPLICATION PREPARATION
Active dates: Mid-March to Mid-May
Viable candidates then receive the entire application package which includes a general VA employment form, requirements associated with the credentialing process at the DC VAMC, and a request to provide three references. Obtaining credentialing (e.g., verification of doctorate degree, citizenship, etc.) and a formal background check (e.g., fingerprinting, etc.) must be successfully completed before fellowship applications may be submitted and approved by the VA Central Office.

The Program Leadership team will then work closely with the selected candidates and mentors to prepare the full fellowship application submission. The research mentor and fellowship candidate will provide a 4 to 6 page fellowship project proposal in support of the full application submission to the VA Central Office. Candidates will also work with the Deputy Program Director and the research mentor to create the individualized learning plan and fellowship objectives featured in the full 20 page application.

Step 4: FULL APPLICATION SUBMISSION
Due date: Late May (the Tuesday following Memorial Day)
The final review of your fellowship application (i.e., research project, learning plan, fellowship objectives, and mentor match) by the VA Central Office will typically take about six to eight weeks. Submission evaluations are based on the quality of the candidate, demonstrated level of institutional
support, strength of the curriculum, and the degree that the fellowship project is aligned with VA priorities. **In general, we will have one to two funded positions per year.** However, the program is designed to accommodate four fellows at any given time. 

**Target appointment date: Mid-July**

**What are the research topic areas? Can I propose an unlisted research topic?**

Research topics may include, but are not limited to:

- TBI evaluation and screening for Veterans/detecting PTSD in Veterans with TBI
- Force control as a diagnostic tool for mild TBI
- Eccentric strengthening for post-traumatic OA
- Fatigue assessment for Veterans with TBI or MS
- Exercise, sleep, endocrine and cognitive function, and brain imaging, in TBI
- Age-related muscle dysfunction in Veterans with multiple comorbidities
- Upper extremity (UE) kinematics with prosthesis use and functional performance
- Neural mechanisms of TBI recovery
- Efficacy of robotic UE training for veterans with TBI
- Biomechanics of UE function following TBI

The project list is subject to change each semester. Therefore, you may contact the Program Leadership to obtain up-to-date information concerning available research topic areas. Approved candidates may propose a new research topic with the agreement of the research mentor and Program Leadership. However, candidates pursuing this option should begin the submission process at least **two semesters** prior to the targeted start date to ensure a timely proposal submission.

**What are the didactic course options?**

Didactic training will be determined by the candidate’s goals, research project needs, input from the research mentor, and recommendations by the program leadership. Some candidates will require more or less training depending on their professional and academic experiences. Nevertheless, the creation of the individualized learning plan is a collective process that requires significant candidate input.

Much of the didactic content is provided by the **Georgetown-Howard Universities Center for Clinical and Translational Science (GHUCCTS) consortium**. Some of the available coursework can be seen via the following links:

- [http://georgetownhowardctsa.org/education/degree-programs/courses-](http://georgetownhowardctsa.org/education/degree-programs/courses-)
- [http://georgetownhowardctsa.org/education/seminars-and-workshops](http://georgetownhowardctsa.org/education/seminars-and-workshops)

Additional non-credit coursework may be provided by the **Georgetown University Interdisciplinary Program in Neuroscience (GU IPN)**. This aspect of the fellowship experience provides access to the academic programming of a nationally-ranked program that is free of tuition for the participants. Check the links on the webpage (below) for the list of available courses:

- [http://neuroscience.georgetown.edu/courses.html](http://neuroscience.georgetown.edu/courses.html)

Some of the GU IPN students are selected to attend the well-known, regional, grant workshop sponsored, in part, by UNC - Chapel Hill and NIH/NCMRR: “Training in Grantsmanship for Rehabilitation Research” (TIGRR). This option will also be available to the P/TBI fellows on a competitive basis:

- [http://tigrr.bme.unc.edu/](http://tigrr.bme.unc.edu/)
Supplemental training may also be obtained from the educational outreach programs provided by the National Institutes of Health Intramural Research Program: 
http://www.cc.nih.gov/training/training/ippcr.html

http://faes.org/grad/advanced_studies/public_health

Finally, didactic training will be supported through various Rounds, workshops, and practicum experiences through the DC VAMC and its affiliates. All fellows receive a research stipend, in addition to salary support, and these funds can be used for 3rd party courses (e.g., clinical courses, signal processing, lab techniques, etc.).

**What is the focus of the curriculum?**
The six curricular domains of the program broadly include:

- Discipline-specific knowledge
  - Neuroscience
  - Polytrauma
  - Rehabilitation
- Research skills and development
- Research ethics
- Communication skills
- Leadership and management skills
- Professionalism

Each fellow will also benefit from the dedicated mentorship time with the Program Director and the research mentor. While ample time may be provided for traditional didactic coursework, attention is given to the implicit learning required for successfully navigating the many challenges associated with a career in clinical research.

**Would I have the opportunity to practice clinically during this fellowship?**
Yes. All fellows have protected research time based on their program track (see page 1). However, time is also provided for the clinical curriculum for Clinical Specialists and Clinician-Investigators who are trained in physical therapy:

- TBI/Polytrauma Clinic
- Polytrauma Clinical Rotation I
- Polytrauma Clinical Rotation II
- Polytrauma Continuity Clinic

The patient population within the clinics will be largely comprised of Veterans with polytrauma (e.g., outpatient orthopedic conditions) and/or chronic mild TBI.

For Rehabilitation Scientist track fellows, 25% of their time may be allocated for a secondary laboratory experience or an administrative/health education option.
Are there teaching requirements during the fellowship?
Teaching opportunities may be afforded based on the needs and goals of each fellow. The minimum amount of teaching required for each fellow is a presentation at the “DC VAMC Polytrauma Grand Rounds” or “MedStar NRH Motor Control Seminar.” In contrast, a fellow with a goal of landing a faculty appointment may opt for the “Teaching Practicum” course and provide instruction for a local Exercise Science or Physical Therapy academic program.

Is the training performed in one mentor's lab or among several labs?
There are no rotating laboratory requirements associated with this fellowship. Once you are paired with a research mentor and agree on a project, you will spend focused time in that specific laboratory or clinic for the duration of the fellowship. However, short-term laboratory and clinic visits may be arranged for fellows seeking exposure to a specific laboratory technique or patient population. Additionally, non-clinical fellows may have a secondary project in another VA-affiliated laboratory.

Additional information concerning selected faculty mentors may be found here:
http://www.3map-lab.com/#!contact-jobs/cdox
http://www.3map-lab.com/#!p-tbi-fellowship-faculty/ckeh

What are the salary and benefits?
The P/TBI Fellowship is a full-time, two-year appointment (the exception is the Clinical Specialist fellowship which is for one year). Salary is based on the experience and training of the candidate and determined by OAA. Typically, the Year 1 fellow salary (with the Washington DC locality rate) starts at a level comparable to a NIH National Research Service Award (NRSA) Year 2 or Year 3 post-doctoral fellow: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-15-048.html

Other benefits, such as leave and medical coverage, are commensurate with standard VA hires: http://www.va.gov/JOBS/Job_Benefits/benefits.asp

All fellows are eligible for standard grade increases during the second year of the fellowship. Also, each P/TBI Fellow receives supplemental research/training funds up to $10,000 annually.

How will the fellowship impact my student loans?
The fellowship is recognized as an educational position. Therefore, student loan forbearance may be possible (check with your student loan provider for confirmation of your status). In addition, fellows that go on to become VA employees may qualify for the Federal Student Loan Repayment Program: http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/student-loan-repayment/

Will I be obligated to work for the VA upon accepting the fellowship?
No. While successful applicants are encouraged to seek a research and/or clinical position with the VA upon completion of the program, no VA employment obligation is linked to this fellowship.

What are the application deadlines?
See the aforementioned dates associated with the application steps. In general, applications will be reviewed as they are received and the position(s) will remain open until filled. Priority reviews are conducted in March.
Typically, the majority of the applications are received by March 1st, and appointments are often made between June and August. (We recommend a start date no later than mid-July for selected fellows involved in Fall university coursework.) However, application volume varies each year, so you should contact program staff if you have additional questions about the timing of your application.

**Will a program representative be available at one of the APTA National Meetings?**
Please contact the Deputy Program Director to arrange for a conference interview or to obtain more information.

**Who do I contact if I have additional questions?**
P/TBI Fellowship Deputy Director:
Dr. Michael Harris-Love
Michael.Harris-Love@va.gov