Rehabilitation Psychology

(Download the Rotation Description)

Overview

This is an ideal rotation for applicants with research and/or clinical interest in health psychology, specifically coping with acute or chronic medical illness. You will be part of several multidisciplinary teams, work in inpatient and outpatient medical settings, and care for patients and families as they cope with life-changing injury and illness.

Rehabilitation Psychology focuses on helping individuals with disabilities (congenital or acquired) and chronic health conditions achieve optimal psychological, physical, and social functioning. Psychotherapy and neuropsychological assessment are provided as part of a multidisciplinary team, specifically:

- Inpatient acute rehabilitation for spinal cord injury, stroke and amputation (West Roxbury campus);
- Sub-acute rehabilitation/transitional care (Brockton campus), typically as a transition from inpatient acute medical/surgical care back to home, or to long-term care if needed;
- Outpatient psychotherapy and assessment (West Roxbury campus, Jamaica Plain campus).

All training is designed to develop foundational and functional competencies for professional rehabilitation psychology practice consistent with Division 22 standards of American Psychological Association and the American Board of Rehabilitation Psychology (i.e., ABPP specialty certification in Rehabilitation Psychology).

This rotation focuses on the entire network of biological, psychological, social, neuro-psychological, and environmental factors that affect the functioning of persons with disabilities and illness, all operating from a scientist-practitioner model. Supervisors function as clinical-academic mentors and interns will have opportunities to be active in areas of clinical practice, clinical research, team building, documentation and education relating to being a professional psychologist within an interdisciplinary team.

Strengths of the rotation include opportunities to implement the biopsychosocial model in the context of an interdisciplinary team that includes medicine, social work, nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language pathology, therapeutic recreation, kinesiotherapy, nutrition, pharmacy, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral Medicine</th>
<th>Center for Returning Veterans</th>
<th>Dual Diagnosis</th>
<th>General Mental Health</th>
<th>Geropsychology</th>
<th>Inpatient Mental Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neuropsychology</td>
<td>PTSD Clinical Team</td>
<td>Rehabilitation Psychology</td>
<td>Substance Abuse Spectrum of Treatment</td>
<td>Substance Abuse Treatment Program</td>
<td>Women’s Stress Disorder Treatment Team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
case management. Ongoing consultation occurs with team members and patients formally and informally. The entire continuum of care is covered from acute injury to chronic disability to palliative and end of life care.

The Rehabilitation Psychology rotation emphasizes closely supervised clinical experiences in inpatient and outpatient settings through the provision of psychological services to individuals with both acute and chronic disabilities and illness. Building upon prior experiences and skills, the intern utilizes supervision and clinical experiences to further develop the provision of psychology services with increased professional autonomy. Interns who complete an 8-month rotation should achieve a proficiency in rehabilitation psychology practice at the internship level, while interns who complete a 4-month rotation will gain exposure and experience in the area of rehabilitation psychology.

Clinical Experience

The primary training site is West Roxbury (2-3 days/week), with 1-2 days/week at Brockton, and the fifth day reserved for other training needs. The veterans we care for have a range of chronic medical conditions, most commonly spinal cord injury/disorders (SCI/D), multiple sclerosis, stroke, or amputation. Spinal cord injuries/disorders are a specialty area for the VA Boston Healthcare System. VA Boston is the regional spinal cord center as a part of the “hub and spokes” model of care for VISN 1 (all VAs in New England) and is one of the premier, pioneering centers in the field of Spinal Cord Medicine. Comprehensive care is provided to patients to improve their health and functional abilities, and maintain quality of life from onset of injury throughout their life.

In addition to acute adjustment to injury, there are also opportunities to learn about palliative care. Palliative care is a medical specialty that focuses on symptom relief for anyone coping with a serious or advanced illness (e.g. cancer, advanced lung or heart disease). The goal of palliative care is to improve quality of life for the patient and family, and to reduce stress associated with serious illness. There are opportunities to be involved in palliative care both within the SCI/D team, as well as the hospital-wide Palliative Care Consult Team. Involvement in the Palliative Care Consult Team is optional. For applicants interested in palliative care, please indicate this in your application or interview.

The Rehabilitation Psychology intern will spend time in three distinct clinical settings over the course of the rotation: inpatient acute and subacute medical units, outpatient clinic, and long-term residential care.

- **Inpatient Acute Rehabilitation:** Interns will work in an acute rehab hospital with individuals with SCI/D, amputation and stroke. Treatment is guided by the biopsychosocial model, and includes a CARF-accredited SCI inpatient program with intensive involvement from medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, kinesiology, speech and language pathology services, recreational therapy, social work, and psychology.

  Interns will be trained in psychological principles and techniques to treat mental health issues including depression, grief, anxiety, late-life PTSD, dementia, behavioral concerns; rehabilitation issues such as adaptation to disability, acute and chronic pain, motivation for therapy, neuropsychological assessment as it pertains to treatment and discharge planning and complex neuropsychiatric presentations which require a full “team intervention” to optimize care. This rotation will be exciting for interns with interests in acute adjustment issues relating to new and pre-existing disability and illness, family roles, re-integration into the community,
neuropsychology, capacity evaluations, acute and chronic pain, crisis intervention, and effects of long-term hospitalization.

- Location: West Roxbury campus. **Supervisors:** Melissa Amick, Ph.D., Kysa Christie, Ph.D., Susan McGlynn, Ph.D., ABPP/cn

- **Sub-Acute Rehabilitation:** The VA Brockton Community Living Center includes two ~30 bed units for sub-acute rehabilitation/transitional care, typically as a transition from inpatient acute medical/surgical care back to home, or to long-term care if needed. Veterans receiving rehabilitation care tend to be middle-aged or older, and frequently have complex, co-morbid medical, psychiatric, substance abuse, and social problems. The intern will attend weekly team meetings, and provide psychological assessment, psychotherapy, and consultation services as part of a consult liaison team that includes a psychologist, psychiatrists, and some combination of the geropsychology postdoctoral fellows, geropsychology interns, and a practicum student at times. Skills developed include: participation in interdisciplinary team discussions of treatment planning; cognitive and mood screenings; capacity evaluations; differential diagnosis in complex patient presentations; adapting psychotherapy interventions for ill or frail elders; and providing nursing staff education and support. Assessment issues include differential diagnosis, decision making capacity, defining the impact of psychological issues on rehabilitation, and communicating assessment results to patients, families, and treatment teams.

  - Location: Brockton campus. **Supervisor:** Kate Hinrichs, Ph.D., ABPP.

- **Long-Term Care:** The VA Brockton campus offers long-term residential care for 30 veterans with SCI/D. The emphasis of the Rehab intern’s training at the Brockton SCI long-term care (LTC) is on hospital team support and development.

  Excellent teams yield excellent care for our veterans. This experience entails working with an interdisciplinary team (e.g., physicians, psychologist, nurses, social work, dietitian, pharmacist, occupational therapist, recreational therapist and physical therapy) providing education and support using your expertise as a clinical psychologist. Each academic semester the intern and partner (another trainee or staff) will collaboratively design and write a curriculum tailored to the current needs of the hospital unit. Along with the partner, interns will conduct weekly sessions for one hour with voluntary attendance from the team. Previous topics included Self-Care Series (stress management; self-assessment; creativity; mindfulness; mindful eating; benefits of exercise); Understanding why and how to work with patients with advancing dementia; Ethics of social media 101; Boundaries in complicated work settings; Late onset PTSD with SCI onset; Working with challenging people; Managing disruptive behaviors; and Behavioral analysis and intervention. Content of each talk is tailored to be unit-centered with practical information that improves overall “health” of an active interdisciplinary team.

  - Location: Brockton campus. **Supervisor:** Maggi Budd, Ph.D., MPH, ABPP/rp

- **Outpatient Psychotherapy and Assessment:** Interns provide outpatient psychotherapy and neuropsychological assessment to individuals living in the community. Individual psychotherapy cases typically have comorbid physical and mental health diagnoses (e.g. SCI/D and depression/anxiety). Opportunities for couples/family therapy may also be available.
Neuropsychological assessment referrals typically include cognitive dysfunction secondary to a medical or psychiatric condition, ADHD, LD, traumatic brain injury and dementia. Neuropsychology assessments involve a clinical interview, test administration, scoring of test data, test interpretation, written report, and in-person feedback to patients.

Interns are also involved in the SCI/D outpatient clinic, specifically the veteran’s annual evaluation appointment. As part of this yearly check-up, the intern conducts psychosocial and cognitive screenings. Screenings focus on adjustment to life changes and stressors, cognitive functioning, sleep, pain management, health promotion and psychoeducation.

Finally, group therapy is conducted in partnership with the Neuropsychology service and includes psychoeducational/cognitive rehabilitation interventions (individual and group co-leadership). The intern will select one or two groups to co-lead. Current groups include Memory and Aging and Memory, ADHD, Epilepsy support group.

- Location: West Roxbury campus, Jamaica Plain campus. Supervisors: Melissa Amick, Ph.D., Kysa Christie, Ph.D., Laura Grande, Ph.D., ABPP/cn, John Otis, Ph.D.

Didactics

The Rehabilitation Psychology rotation includes a weekly didactic in psychotherapies that are particularly relevant to chronic illness and disability (e.g. coping effectiveness, motivational interviewing, chronic pain management, ACT). The Rehab interns also attend the weekly Geropsychology seminar, and is encouraged to attend the weekly SCI/D physician lecture series and journal club. There are also monthly lectures and educational opportunities including Schwartz Rounds and Mental Health Ground Rounds. Interns have opportunities to attend other educational opportunities through VA Boston, Boston University School of Medicine, and Harvard Medical School.

Selection Criteria

The successful applicant will have had a minimum of one practicum experience, or research experience with a medical population. Coursework and/or research in the areas of behavioral medicine, rehabilitation psychology, medical psychology, neuropsychology, geropsychology or any similar demonstration of interest and commitment to the field of rehabilitation psychology are beneficial. Previous exposure to cognitive or neuropsychological assessment is useful but not required.

Supervision

The rehabilitation psychology intern receives at least four hours of weekly supervision, at least two hours of which are individual with the primary supervisor. Weekly group supervision is also provided as an opportunity to discuss cases from multiple perspectives. The long-term therapy supervisor provides an additional hour of supervision.
Research

Interns have the opportunity to collaborate on a number of clinical research projects that are at various stages of development. Opportunities exist for assisting with and coordination of data collection and analysis, manuscript writing, and conference presentations. Additional experiences are often available to help with peer editing for professional journals. Scholarly inquiry, program evaluation, dissemination and literature reviews relating to clinical cases are a regular part of this rotation.

Current active areas of research include:

- Biomarkers of OEF/OIF Deployment related cognitive and emotional disorders;
- Biomarkers of cerebrovascular risk in SCI;
- Post traumatic headache, pain and PTSD, and application of the Unified Protocol;
- Creating a model for interest in living versus desire to die in populations with severe disabilities;
- Ethical dilemmas within clinical practice.

Recent representative publications from this rotation include:


Topor, D., **Christie, K.M.** (In press). Group Psychotherapy. In **M. Budd, S. Hough, W. Stiers, S.T. Wegener** (Eds.), *Practical Psychology in Medical Rehabilitation.*