The Behavioral Medicine rotation provides interns with experiences to develop competencies consistent with the professional practice of health psychology. Behavioral Medicine, as a primary (8-month) rotation, provides excellent preparation for those interns seeking a career in behavioral medicine. Interns will develop the necessary skills to work effectively with diverse medical populations and those seeking to change health behaviors. They will also learn evidence-based behavioral medicine interventions and assessments, and develop consultation skills in interfacing with other disciplines, both in one-to-one and team contexts. Throughout the rotation, interns will refine their skills in case conceptualization, treatment planning, and administration. Interns develop these skills through their participation in an array of clinical settings (e.g. outpatient mental health, primary care, specialty medical clinics) that are described below. In addition to clinical training, interns will have the opportunity to develop skills in research, program development, program evaluation, and supervision of practicum students. The training opportunities available in each of these domains are discussed below in detail.

Moreover, interns will develop a clear understanding of the role that psychologists can play in enhancing health outcomes and quality of life, and a sophisticated appreciation for the complex interrelationship between behavior and health. They will learn to work effectively in the context of an academic medical center setting with professionals from other disciplines. The Behavioral Medicine Program at VA Boston is proud to be a program member of the Council of Clinical Health Psychology Training programs (CCHPTP) which promotes the advancement of education and training within the field of Clinical Health Psychology, demonstrating our commitment to the highest standards within the field.
Please note that interns with a secondary focus in Behavioral Medicine (those who complete a 4-month rotation) will also obtain significant experience with medical and health-related issues, and this training can serve as an excellent complement to other primary rotation experiences.

The daily activities of the Behavioral Medicine interns are similar to that of a staff psychologist embedded in an outpatient mental health clinic with a health psychology focus. Thus, Behavioral Medicine interns will develop the skills necessary to function professionally as a Clinical Health Psychologist. The training objectives for this rotation include the following:

- Interns will develop skills in conducting comprehensive, biopsychosocial, and scientifically-informed assessments and intakes for different medical populations within the general Behavioral Medicine Clinic, as well as conducting evaluations for pre-surgical and pre-treatment candidates, chronic pain, and sexual dysfunction. As part of the assessment process, interns will learn to conduct a medical record review, choose measures that will assist in case conceptualization, and turn to the literature to understand the specific issues that arise with specific disease processes. Interns will develop strong case conceptualization skills, integrating all data gleaned from the assessment process, and will formulate targeted treatment recommendations that will result in a well written report.

- Interns will develop skills in conducting short-term, evidence-based, cognitive-behavioral individual, couples, and group psychotherapy with Veterans with a broad range of medical conditions and those seeking to change health behaviors. The intern will learn to develop and carry out evidence-based behavioral medicine treatment plans focused on coping effectively with major medical illnesses and invasive treatments, assisting Veterans to change health compromising behaviors, encouraging treatment adherence, behaviorally managing chronic conditions, and enhancing overall quality of life.

- Interns will develop proficiency in understanding the critical role of interdisciplinary consultation in an outpatient medical center, and will develop consultation and liaison skills throughout the healthcare system. Interns will also develop expertise and confidence in presenting cases at team meetings.

- Interns will develop supervisory skills within a Behavioral Medicine context. Specifically, interns will have the opportunity to work alongside and co-lead groups with more junior psychology trainees. These experiences allow for opportunities in leadership, modeling, and mentorship of those trainees.

- Interns will enhance their competency in the area of professional development and growth, including understanding and appreciating ethical, legal, and cultural issues related to both clinical and scientific activities, particularly as they relate to patients with chronic medical conditions (i.e., ethical issues related to compliance and treatment decisions, appreciating the unique needs of patients with medical illness).
• Interns will develop competency in conducting various aspects of Behavioral Medicine research through involvement in an array of clinical research programs and program evaluation opportunities. More information can be found in the research section below.

~ Clinical Experience ~
Below is an overview of clinical programs that our Major Rotation Behavioral Medicine interns participate in [(though please note that there are additional experiences that a trainee may be interested in and can be negotiated (e.g., participation in the Bariatrics Clinic at West Roxbury)].

▶ Assessment and Treatment Clinic: Interns gain advanced skills in conducting comprehensive, biopsychosocial assessments and intakes, case conceptualization, formulation of treatment recommendations, and individual therapy within this clinic. In this clinic, interns provide short term, evidence-based treatment for patients referred to the Behavioral Medicine Service from across the hospital system. Treatment in this clinic is geared toward helping patients cope effectively with major medical illnesses and invasive treatments, promoting healthy lifestyles, encouraging treatment adherence, and enhancing overall quality of life. Although referrals are broad and varying in focus, common presenting issues seen in this clinic include adjustment to as well as prevention and management of the following conditions: insomnia, cancer, vision difficulties, tinnitus and other hearing difficulties, diabetes, cardiac conditions, obesity, tobacco use, endocrine disorders, pulmonary conditions, chronic fatigue, and gastrointestinal conditions. Education and skill development specific to interdisciplinary collaboration and consultation are a central focus in this clinic. Opportunities for providing instruction and modeling how to conduct intakes with practicum students may exist in this clinic as well.

SUPERVISORS: REBECCA AMETRANO, PH.D., MICHELLE KOVACS, PH.D., SARAH LEONE, PH.D., MORGAN MCGILLICUDDY, PH.D., DEANNA MORI, PH.D., AND AMY SILBERBOGEN, PH.D., ABPP.

▶ Health Promotion Disease Prevention (HPDP): Interns are embedded in a busy primary care clinic offering co-located, collaborative health promotion disease prevention services to Veterans with diverse medical and psychiatric histories. The interns will gain skills in conducting brief assessments and time-limited, individual interventions focused on health behavior change (e.g., tobacco use cessation, weight management, and diabetes management) using evidence-based interventions (e.g., motivational interviewing, health coaching, problem-solving, and cognitive-behavioral techniques). Often referrals in this clinic are the result of a “warm hand-off” (i.e., unscheduled, same-day appointment following a primary care visit), which affords skill development in offering on-the-spot triage, assessment, treatment planning, and brief intervention to Veterans in primary care. This unique clinical setting also facilitates skill development in coaching and consultation with clinicians from a wide range of disciplines, including Patient Aligned Care Team members (i.e., physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, health technicians, medical support assistants) and allied healthcare professionals (i.e., social workers, pharmacists, dietitians, and other mental health professionals). Often, interdisciplinary team members solicit support and feedback from interns specific to navigating challenging patient
interactions, facilitating their own skill development in patient-centered communication and motivational interviewing, as well as practicing a Whole Health approach to patient care. As such, there are also opportunities to conduct joint medical visits with interdisciplinary staff, participate in shared medical appointments for specific diagnoses (e.g., diabetes), and present relevant topics at large all-staff meetings. Behavioral Medicine trainees have also attended nationally accredited trainings in Motivational Interviewing, TEACH For Success, and Whole Health workshops facilitated locally at VA Boston. In addition, interns may participate in several other hospital-wide health promotion activities, such as the Great American Smokeout, the VA2K Challenge, and other local employee and patient health fairs.

SUPERVISOR: SARAH BANKOFF LEONE, PH.D.

- **End Stage Renal Disease Program:** The interns will have the opportunity to see patients within the Renal Service and Hemodialysis Unit. Issues addressed with the renal population include adherence to treatment and dietary restrictions, needle phobias and other anxiety reactions, death and dying, coping with a chronic illness, quality of life, family issues, and affective disorders. The model of care in this program is consistent with a consultation liaison approach where care is typically delivered at bedside, while patients are receiving dialysis. This unique experience of working in the context of a critical care unit allows interns to learn how to deliver care alongside medical care providers. Interns have the opportunity to attend the monthly team meetings where they can directly contribute to the individualized treatment plans of all dialysis patients. There is also an opportunity to carry out and evaluate an Innovation Project that was recently awarded to Behavioral Medicine. With funding through this project, dialysis patients are provided with IPads which are used to engage them in both educational and entertainment programs. The goal is to make the experience of undergoing an invasive and chronic procedure more acceptable, with the hope of improving treatment adherence and overall quality of life.

SUPERVISOR: DEANNA MORI, PH.D.

- **Behavioral Sleep Program:** The interns will have an opportunity to provide services for individuals who are suffering from insomnia and other sleep difficulties, including sleep apnea and narcolepsy. Interns will learn how to conduct a focused sleep assessment, co-lead a sleep education group, provide cognitive-behavioral therapy for insomnia, and address CPAP adherence. Interns have also taken advantage of opportunities to shadow sleep medicine doctors and technicians in the sleep lab.

SUPERVISOR: DEANNA MORI, PH.D.

- **Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation Programs:** The Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation Programs are both interdisciplinary programs that provide services to patients who need physical, psychological, social, and nutritional rehabilitation due to disabilities resulting from cardiac disease (e.g., MI, angina, coronary artery bypass graft, or congestive heart failure) or pulmonary disease (e.g., COPD, emphysema, cystic fibrosis, etc.). The goal of both programs is to improve the patients’ daily functioning through exercise, education and cognitive-behavioral interventions. Interns have an
opportunity to co-lead groups that are part of a larger interdisciplinary rehabilitation program, including cardiologists/pulmonologists, nutritionists, physician’s assistants, respiratory therapists, occupational therapists, and exercise physiologists. In addition to honing group co-leadership skills and delivering CBT interventions, Interns will learn skills in navigating delivery of services within a non-traditional setting (in an exercise room), “selling” mental health services to treatment naive patients, and interacting effectively with a host of busy disciplines. There are ample opportunities for interprofessional collaboration and interactions, including shadowing the other disciplines who provide care to the patients.

SUPERVISOR: AMY SILBERBOGEN, PH.D, ABPP

- **Pre-Treatment Evaluations:** Interns will conduct biopsychosocial pre-treatment assessments. Most of the assessments conducted are for the Transplant, Transgender and Bariatric Surgery Programs, but other types of pre-surgical or pre-treatment evaluations are sometimes conducted. A team-based approach is used in this clinic, with a staff member conducting the first evaluation and designated trainees taking the lead thereafter, typically with a supervisor and other team members present. We believe that this structure maximizes opportunities to gain experience with these evaluations. In general, the goal of these evaluations is to determine appropriateness or readiness for a treatment or surgery and to make recommendations that are designed to enhance outcomes. Please see descriptions below for more information specific to each evaluation.

- **Transplant Program:** The interns will have the opportunity to evaluate patients who are being considered for all solid-organ (kidney, liver, heart, lung) and stem-cell/bone marrow transplantation. The comprehensive evaluation includes psychometric testing, a semi-structured interview, communication with other providers, and a thorough chart review. The purpose of these evaluations is to determine the candidates’ psychological readiness for transplantation by evaluating motivation for transplantation, how well informed they are about the process, their history of medical adherence and likelihood of being adherent with the transplant protocol, and their psychological stability to undergo a major medical intervention. There are also opportunities to evaluate living donors and family members who have been identified as transplant caregivers. Interns gain knowledge about the medical aspects and process of organ transplantation, and become familiar with the National VA Guidelines for Transplantation. Interns learn how to write a comprehensive yet focused report that is used by medical providers to make treatment decisions. In this vein, Interns learn how to distill the information they have obtained to make very clear and behavioral recommendations that are achievable for each patient. The ethical implications of writing a report and making recommendations that have significant life or death implications for patients is a theme that is discussed regularly. There are many rich opportunities for interdisciplinary communication and collaboration when conducting these evaluations. In addition, neuropsychological
testing is a component of these evaluations, and Interns have opportunities to collaborate with the Neuropsychology team.

**SUPERVISORS:** MICHELLE KOVACS, PH.D., AND DEANNA MORI, PH.D.

**Transgender Program:** The Interns will have the opportunity to conduct pre-treatment evaluations for transgender Veterans who are seeking cross-sex hormone treatment or gender confirmation surgery. The care provided is consistent with the standard of care recommended by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). Considerable attention is given to the importance of providing culturally competent care to this population of individuals who have well documented health and healthcare disparities. Interns will learn to conduct standardized interviews to ensure that the candidates are well informed and adequately prepared for treatment. A detailed report is prepared with behavioral recommendations focused on enhancing readiness, removing barriers to care, and increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes. These reports are typically prepared for the medical providers who deliver transgender care (e.g., endocrinology, surgery), so fellows learn how to write a mental health report that is helpful for other providers. There is also the opportunity to participate in interdisciplinary transgender team meetings with providers from mental health, endocrinology, primary care, social work and speech therapy. By participating with this very active team, Interns will have opportunities to provide LGBT education to other staff members, and participate in tabling and other outreach events.

**SUPERVISORS:** MICHELLE KOVACS, PH.D., AND DEANNA MORI, PH.D.

**MOVE! Weight Management Program:** MOVE! is a national weight management program developed by VA to facilitate the development of self-management skills for Veterans diagnosed with obesity or Veterans who are overweight with high-risk comorbidities. The VA Boston MOVE! Program is an interdisciplinary clinic that offers ongoing psychoeducation and self-management groups co-led by the Behavioral Medicine trainees and primary care dietitians. Interns can participate in the structured, evidence-based, 16-week weight management group. Interns will develop skills in offering psychoeducation specific to healthy eating and lifestyle change, self-management skills to support weight loss and healthy living more generally, as well as health coaching and motivational interviewing within a group context. Interns involved in this program will gain experience conducting cognitive-behavioral interventions to facilitate weight loss and health promotion within an interdisciplinary environment, and there are many opportunities for clinician coaching, interdisciplinary consultation, program development and evaluation, and supervision of junior colleagues in this clinic.

**SUPERVISOR:** SARAH LEONE, PH.D.

**Sexual Health Clinic:** Interns will have the opportunity to receive unique and specialized training within sexual health, an important area of functioning that is often neglected within mental health and medical settings. Interns will receive education
and training regarding sexual difficulties that impact male and female Veterans, as well as important considerations in talking with patients about such a private area of life. Interns will learn to conduct a biopsychosocial intake with Veterans referred for difficulties with sexual functioning (through observing the supervisor and, subsequently, being observed), and develop skills in case conceptualization, and formulation of treatment recommendations. Interdisciplinary interactions may include consultation with endocrinology, urology providers, and/or primary care. Interns may also pick up sex therapy cases (individual and/or couples) to provide cognitive-behavioral treatment to address the presenting difficulty.

SUPERVISOR: AMY SILBERBOGEN, PH.D., ABPP

- **Tobacco Cessation Program:** The interns may have the opportunity to provide tobacco cessation services in a group format, working in collaboration with other psychology staff and with pharmacy staff. The Tobacco Cessation Program utilizes an evidence-based (e.g. cognitive behavioral, motivational enhancement), interdisciplinary approach to helping Veterans develop personalized SMART goals and quit plans, manage triggers and corresponding urges to use tobacco products, and develop strategies for relapse prevention. The format of the group is unique, blending a drop-in group format (to facilitate immediate access to Tobacco Cessation services) with a core curriculum of evidence based topics. Providers from Pharmacy are involved in every session and also lead one group topic per month; accordingly, trainees become well-versed in pharmacological interventions for tobacco cessation.

SUPERVISOR: MICHELLE KOVACS, PH.D.

- **Healthy Coping and Wellness Groups:** The Behavioral Medicine Program runs three different cognitive-behavioral groups that are designed to promote adaptive coping in the context of chronic illness and/or stress. Interns may co-lead these groups with each other, practicum students, and/or staff (in the case of the Medical Issues Group). In each of these groups, co-leaders learn group management skills and best practices as it pertains to co-leadership.

The following groups are conducted regularly:

- **Stress Management Group:** The Stress Management Group is a twelve-week manualized group for individuals interested in learning stress management skills. Co-leaders learn skills in providing cognitive-behavioral stress management and relaxation techniques to patients with a variety of medical and mental health difficulties.

SUPERVISOR: AMY SILBERBOGEN, PH.D., ABPP.

- **Healthy Thinking Group:** The Healthy Thinking Group is a ten-week manualized group for medical patients who also have symptoms of depression. Patients learn cognitive-behavioral strategies to address their negative thoughts and learn ways to cope more effectively with their medical
illness. Co-leaders learn skills in providing cognitive-behavioral treatment in the context of medical illness to patients with a variety of chronic illnesses.

**SUPERVISOR:** AMY SILBERBOGEN, PH.D., ABPP.

- **Medical Issues Group:** This is an educational/support group for individuals with major medical issues who have typically gone through other Behavioral Medicine programing, and are interested in longer term treatment. The focus of this ongoing group is to learn to live a high-quality life, despite having medical issues. Although less structured than the other groups, a topic is covered each week that focuses on helping individuals find adaptive ways to cope with their medical conditions and treatments with the goal of enhancing their quality of life. Interns can develop and deliver curriculum that is tailored to the group’s interests and needs, and have opportunities to interact with and learn from a broad range of professionals from other services who attend the group as guest speakers.

  **SUPERVISOR:** DEANNA MORI, PH.D.

- **Psychology Pain Management Clinic:** This program is embedded in the VABHS Pain Clinic, an interdisciplinary pain medicine clinic that includes interventional pain medicine physicians (and fellows), pain neurology, pain psychology, nursing staff, acupuncture, and related professionals. Trainees will be actively involved in conducting comprehensive pain assessments for a variety of painful conditions, with a particular focus on musculoskeletal conditions and headache. Trainees will also provide short-term, individual, evidence-based cognitive-behavioral therapies for these painful conditions. Opportunities to participate in the VABHS Interdisciplinary Pain Clinic, which provides consultative services for challenging patients with chronic pain, are also offered. In addition to clinical training, trainees will have opportunities for exposure to the process of developing and implementing VA-based pain care policy at local, regional, and national levels, as well as research opportunities in one of several ongoing funded studies focused on chronic pain.

  **SUPERVISOR:** DIANA HIGGINS, PH.D.

- **Diabetes Shared Medical Appointment (SMA):** There may be opportunities for interns to participate in a Diabetes SMA during the course of the training year. SMAs are medical visits in which multiple patients meet in a group format with providers from a range of disciplines (e.g., psychology, nutrition, medicine, pharmacy). This innovative approach to healthcare brings patients with similar needs together, while receiving intervention from all disciplines involved. The Diabetes SMA is currently a six-session group run by psychology, nutrition, and pharmacy focused on improving patients’ diabetes management from multiple perspectives. Interns training in this setting would have the opportunity to intervene directly with behavioral health skills, as well as learn how to facilitate these interprofessional interventions.

  **SUPERVISOR:** SARAH BANKOFF LEONE, PH.D.
~ Instruction ~

The Behavioral Medicine supervisors incorporate a developmental model of supervision when working with interns and collaboratively evaluate the intern’s previous experience across content areas to inform instruction. Regardless of expertise level, all interns will have access to a multitude of evidence-based assessment materials, treatment manuals, and medically-focused educational information intended to further develop skills and competencies. Supervisors spend considerable time in supervision discussing the nuanced clinical considerations specific to working with various medical populations within the Veteran population and review relevant intervention and assessment strategies using various instructional methods. For example, interns generally have the opportunity to observe a staff psychologist conduct intakes and assessments, and are then, in turn, observed themselves. Interns are provided with feedback that will assist in further skill development in a supportive and constructive manner. Staff psychologists may also co-lead groups with interns or observe groups, affording further opportunities for feedback.

Behavioral Medicine also maintains a weekly team meeting where didactics are presented on relevant topics, clinical case presentations are facilitated by staff and trainees, and research and other current issues in Behavioral Medicine are discussed. The team also reserves at least one meeting each month to focus on diversity, and we regularly invite content experts from across the healthcare system to facilitate discussions (e.g., suicide prevention coordinator, tinnitus program clinician). In addition, Behavioral Medicine interns are invited to join monthly local and/or national educational calls within the areas of primary care, health promotion/disease prevention, tobacco cessation, whole health practice, and mental health. Finally, there are a variety of Behavioral Medicine seminars that are offered to all interns throughout the training program as a part of the weekly didactic series. Topic areas that have been presented in the past include: weight related disorders, whole health, motivational interviewing, pain disorders, sexual disorders, death and dying, CBT for insomnia, telehealth interventions, cardiac rehabilitation, AIDS, smoking cessation, etc.

~ Supervision ~

Each Intern in Behavioral Medicine will meet for weekly, 60-minute, individual supervision sessions with a staff psychologist who serves as a primary advisor and supervisor. The Primary Supervisor offers supervision for patients seen through the Assessment and Treatment Clinic, offers professional development and mentorship, and has a birds-eye view on the interns’ entire experience within Behavioral Medicine. Interns will also receive supervision for each additional clinic, group or activity they participate in (e.g. interns in the Smoking Cessation group will meet with the lead psychologist for that program for 30 minutes each week). As a result, interns are offered the opportunity to work closely with a number of professionals in their particular areas of expertise. The primary theoretical orientation of staff on the Behavioral Medicine team is Cognitive Behavioral, and evidence-based frameworks guide assessment, intervention, consultation, and provision of supervision. The Behavioral Medicine team utilizes a developmental, junior colleague model of supervision. In addition to weekly individualized supervision, a number of services on the Behavioral Medicine rotation include a live supervision
component (e.g. conducting assessments as part of a team with staff present; co-leading groups and sessions with supervisors).

~ Research ~

Several of the programs in Behavioral Medicine are part of a clinical research protocol, and all interns will have exposure to working in programs that follow a scientist/practitioner model. Interns will meet their Research competency requirements through collaborating with staff on ongoing empirical research, and/or through program development and evaluation work. Trainees have opportunities to present their work from these collaborations at local, national and international conferences, as well as in peer-reviewed journals. Currently and recently funded projects include: Novel Treatments for Veterans for Gulf War Illness, Tai Chi Mind-Body Exercise for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Military Populations, Telehealth Intervention to Promote Exercise for Diabetes, Promoting Physical Activity in Overweight and Obese Veterans, Improving Diabetic Treatment Adherence: A Telehealth Intervention, and Treatment of Posttraumatic Headache. In addition, there are several other research projects in various stages of development. There are opportunities to work with faculty outside of the Behavioral Medicine team, as well.

▶ Selected recent publications from our staff (highlighted):


