~ Overview ~

The Substance Use Disorders – Spectrum of Treatment rotation at the VA Boston Healthcare System prepares interns to work in a variety of settings and provides the intern with highly marketable skills in treating substance use disorders and their common comorbidities. The intern learns to:

- Deliver evidence-based assessments and psychotherapies for substance use and co-occurring disorders;
- Provide an internationally-recognized, empirically-supported Behavioral Couples Therapy (BCT) and have the opportunity to become a certified BCT-SUD provider;
- Conduct Seeking Safety and Relapse Prevention Groups;
- Deliver Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) for PTSD and have the opportunity to become a certified CPT provider;
- Complete risk assessments for complex clinical situations;
- Administer treatments in both residential and outpatient levels of care;
- Provide continuous care;
- Participate in clinical research and program evaluation.

The Alcohol and Drug Treatment Program (ADTP) and the Project for Counseling Alcoholics’ Marriages (CALM) are outpatient clinics located on the first floor of Building 5; the Center for Integrated Residential Care for Addictions (CIRCA) is a residential rehabilitation program located on the first floor of Building 2. Our population of Veterans consists of male and female (majority male) adults with a wide range of ages.
(average 42 years), who often present with significant psychosocial stressors as a consequence of their SUD, including unemployment and homelessness.

~ Clinical Experience ~

The Brockton Substance Use Disorder, Spectrum of Treatment rotation offers a comprehensive and integrated clinical training experience, across three clinical programs providing different intensities and modalities of care, with the goal of providing interns significant breadth and depth of experience with a variety of substance use and co-occurring disorders. The three clinical settings are the:

- Center for Integrated Residential Care for Addictions (CIRCA);
- Outpatient Alcohol and Drug Treatment Program (ADTP);
- Project for Counseling Alcoholics’ Marriages (CALM).

Professional psychologists in the above three programs have key leadership roles in program management, clinical care, supervision/training, program development, and evaluation/research. Interns complete comprehensive intake assessments and treatment plans and provide evidence-based psychotherapies in all components of the rotation.

► In the Center for Integrated Residential Care for Addictions (CIRCA), the intern conducts screening assessments to determine appropriateness for program admission. The intern also serves as a treatment team leader for 1-2 patients and is responsible for providing individual therapy and coordinating care for up to 2 CIRCA residents at any given time. At the beginning of the year, the intern and Dr. Aida Čajdrić-Vrhovac co-facilitate a manually-guided relapse prevention group. Once the intern reaches a level of competence, the intern assumes responsibility for leading the group. Group therapy experience will be with cognitive-behavioral relapse prevention techniques, DBT-oriented emotion-regulation skills training, and/or CBT for depression and anxiety. The time commitment in CIRCA is approximately 12 hours per week.

► In the Outpatient Alcohol and Drug Treatment Program (ADTP), the intern and Dr. Judith Bayog co-lead the Stage 1 group, a manually guided group designed to help clients move through the early stages of change to their substance use. Given that the Veterans who attend the group are, by nature of their use, at high risk for problematic behavior, the intern remains a co-facilitator with their supervisor throughout the training year. The intern also manages a small caseload of up to 4 clients and learns to provide CBT-SUD, MI, CPT, and ACT. In addition, the intern may have the opportunity to receive supervision in Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) by a postdoctoral fellow. The intern also is provided the opportunity to attend local training in CPT and may choose to attend additional supervision through the Adjunctive Treatment Experience (ATE) for the purpose of becoming a certified CPT provider. The time commitment in the ADTP Outpatient Clinic is approximately 12 hours per week.

► In the Project for Counseling Alcoholics’ Marriages (CALM), the intern attends didactics provided by Dr. O’Farrell and learns to effectively deliver behavioral couples therapy for alcoholism and drug abuse. The intern works with Veterans and their partners to support the Veteran’s abstinence and improve relationship functioning. Under the supervision of Dr. O’Farrell, the intern assesses and treats two to three couples at any given time. The time commitment
varies according to the intern’s interest. The intern will have the opportunity to become a certified CBT-SUD provider.

Throughout the rotation, the intern is provided a unique opportunity to work with patients across a continuum of care, and with patients who have substance use problems that differ in duration and severity, as well as a wide range of co-occurring mental health problems. Interns learn to coordinate care with psychiatrists, psychiatry residents, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and health technicians. Additionally, they collaborate with other VA clinic staff and programs (e.g., homelessness programs, suicide prevention programs, long-term residential programs, work therapy programs,) as well as community resources (e.g., 12-Step programs, SMART recovery, Veteran support groups) to provide additional support for patients. All of the substance use disorder treatment programs have a steady flow of patients that ensure access to a rich set of training experiences. The intern provides services for a patient population diverse in age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion and spiritual beliefs, cultural identity, trauma history, era of military service, and combat experience. Working across settings provides the intern with an opportunity to learn evidence-based treatment approaches appropriate to the level of care (e.g., abstinence vs. controlled drinking), and to work with patients at varying stages of recovery and readiness to work on other life problems. Patients enrolled in these clinics often receive treatments that address co-occurring mental health problems (e.g., Mood and Anxiety Disorders, including PTSD), and the intern gains proficiency treating a range of mental health problems in the context of addiction. Staff works closely with interns to develop a balanced caseload that promotes maximum professional development as well as self-care. The total percent of intern time devoted to direct patient care is approximately 50% of the training week, with an additional 15% spent in supervision and clinic specific didactics.

In addition to clinical experiences, interns spend time in research and program evaluation, addiction-specific didactics (described below), and case conferences/clinical team meetings. Interdisciplinary resources are utilized to provide interns with current research and treatment innovations and a forum for professional collaboration and discussion.

~ Instruction ~

In addition to the weekly Internship seminar series attended by trainees across all rotations, there are three venues to impart knowledge about the evaluation and treatment of substance use disorders and promote the intern’s professional development. The first venue, the Addiction Journal Club is a monthly meeting of interdisciplinary faculty, interns, and fellows that focuses on maintaining the scientist-practitioner model by keeping current on empirical and theoretical advances that can inform clinical practice. The second venue is a monthly SUD Open Forum that provides semi-structured didactics as well as the opportunity for a free exchange of ideas related to SUD treatment. The third venue is the PTSD/SUD Clinical Forum that is open to all psychology interns on Brockton rotations, as well as multidisciplinary staff from SUD and PTSD clinics in Brockton. The primary focus of this semi-structured forum is on issues unique to the assessment and treatment of PTSD and/or SUD, and the forum will include the opportunity for informal case presentation.

~ Supervision ~

At the Brockton Substance Use Disorder, Spectrum of Treatment rotation, several psychologists provide training for the intern in their respective programs:
Judith Bayog, Ph.D. Licensed Psychologist, Program Manager of the Outpatient ADTP Clinic, and Assistant Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School is the primary supervisor for this rotation. She coordinates the various training components of the rotation, and helps interns develop training plans that maximize professional development in the context of good self-care. She is certified in CBT-SUD, MET and CPT. Dr. Bayog will provide the intern with two hours/week of individual supervision.

Aida Čajdrić-Vrhovac, Ph.D. Licensed Psychologist, Program Manager of the Center for Integrated Residential Care for Addictions (CIRCA), and Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine. Dr. Čajdrić-Vrhovac is the primary coordinator and supervisor for activities in CIRCA. She will provide two hours/week of individual and group supervision.

Justin Enggasser, Ph.D. Licensed Psychologist and the Section Chief of Substance Abuse Treatment Services at VA Boston Healthcare. He is an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine, and Instructor in Psychology at Harvard Medical School. He will provide supplemental supervision for the trainees on CIRCA or ADTP activities, as needed.

Timothy O’Farrell, Ph.D., ABPP Licensed Psychologist, Director of the CALM Project at VA Boston, and Professor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School. He will provide one hour/week of individual supervision.

Daniel Rounsaville, Ph.D. Licensed Psychologist in ADTP and Instructor in Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He will provide one hour of individual supervision every two weeks for program evaluation/research.

The psychology intern is provided one half hour of supervision per week by the psychology postdoctoral fellow specializing in substance use disorders. This supervision is in addition to supervision with the above psychologists. The postdoctoral fellow is, in turn, supervised by a licensed and credential psychologist who maintains legal responsibility for the case.

~ Research ~

Much of the empirical support for BCT for SUD has come from projects conducted here at VA Boston. Dr. Timothy O’Farrell currently has projects on BCT for alcoholism and drug abuse, domestic violence among male and female alcoholic patients, and other aspects of families and addiction. He has a strong interest in collaborating with interns and fellows; over 90 of his publications have been co-authored with former trainees. Interns are provided the opportunity to join ongoing projects or initiate small-scale projects with existing databases.

Dr. Enggasser is the Section Chief for Substance Use Disorder Treatment Services at VA Boston, and is available as a research mentor for interns interested in SUD related research. Dr. Enggasser is involved primarily in research focused on developing new treatment models and treatment delivery methods for individuals with substance use disorders and co-occurring PTSD. Current research opportunities with Dr. Enggasser include involvement in ongoing research efforts focused on 1) developing and evaluating Web and mobile phone-based self-help interventions for veterans with problem drinking and trauma symptoms or 2) identifying predictors of treatment retention and outcomes of IM Naltrexone (Vivitrol) treatment for opioid use disorder. Specific activities connected with these projects can vary depending on a trainee’s interest and goals, as well as the status of the project at the time the trainee is available.
Opportunities are available for trainees to participate in program evaluation across any of the clinics involved in this rotation. Interns have the option to participate in ongoing Performance Improvement (PI) projects in ADTP directed by Dr. Judith Bayog or in CIRCA under the direction of Dr. Čajdrić-Vrhovac. There are pre- and post-treatment measures for treatment outcome in ADTP and CIRCA. Interns who prefer to conduct their own group and implement pre- and post-treatment measures will be mentored through this process. Substance abuse treatment clinics compile program evaluation reports tracking consults and treatment retention, and the intern is encouraged to participate in these activities as well. Finally, ADTP and CIRCA have ongoing efforts to gather client satisfaction data in order to guide program development efforts, and the intern can gather, analyze, and synthesize data from these surveys.

Selected recent publications from our staff (highlighted):


