PROJECT ABSTRACT

Training Graduate Students to Work with Disadvantaged Populations: A Pediatric Psychology Specialization

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Psychology Program
Funding Preference: High Rate; Funding Priority: 1 (Vulnerable Populations)
Doctoral Psychology Program (American Psychological Association Accredited)

Overview. Georgia’s population has severe and pervasive mental health problems, but the state is poorly equipped to meet these needs. The issue is especially acute for ethnic minority and pediatric populations in Atlanta. Sickle cell disease (SCD), which occurs predominantly in people of African descent, is associated with frequent and intense pain and impaired academic, social, and family functioning. Local and national data indicate that these patients are globally underserved and undertreated. Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA) – the largest provider of pediatric SCD services in the U.S. – treats approximately 1600 pediatric patients with SCD. However, the patients’ needs – especially behavioral concerns – extend well beyond available services. The Georgia State University (GSU) Clinical Psychology program aims to train psychologists to provide evidence-based, culturally-competent services.

Objectives. The goals of this project, which meet needs of Georgia, Atlanta, our community, GSU, CHOA, patients, and the trainees, are as follows: 1) Develop evidence-based practitioners, 2) Train culturally-competent psychologists, 3) Train skills in working in an interdisciplinary team, and 4) Train clinical child and pediatric psychology assessment and therapy skills.

Methodology. The goals of this project will be achieved via training in research methodology, non-specific clinical skills, diversity, culturally-competent clinical services, interdisciplinary skills, and child clinical skills provided by a team of interdisciplinary staff from GSU and CHOA. The project activities – including didactics, seminars, courses, and practica – will be held at GSU and the 3 CHOA children’s hospitals. As part of the nested RCQI assessment system, direct, indirect, and continuous outcome measures completed by a multidisciplinary team from GSU and CHOA include attendance; course ratings; competency evaluations; patient contact hours; patient therapy ratings; conference presentations and publications; and placement in internships, postdocs, and jobs with a primary focus on serving disadvantaged populations. In the 2010-2014 and 2014-current GPE projects, 19 trainees participated, and results consistently demonstrate success in meeting project goals. Some examples are that the prior trainees averaged 170 patient encounters annually, received multiple diversity awards and prestigious fellowships, published or presented numerous works, and secured competitive internships, postdocs, and jobs working with disadvantaged populations. In sum, there are needs at the national, state, city, hospital, program, patient, and trainee levels, which could be partially met by the proposed training project, which has documented success over the past 6 years.

Eligibility for Funding Preference and Funding Priority. The proposed project fits criteria for Funding Preference Qualification 1 (High Rate) by placing greater than 50% of graduates in practice settings having the principal focus of serving medically underserved communities. In addition, this application fits Funding Priority 1 (Vulnerable Populations) given that the training targets children with chronic illness and their families.