Why did you select the Columbia VA? What makes your program unique?

Andrew Daugherty, PGY2 Psychiatry: “I had an exceptional experience throughout my PGY1 Residency at another VA facility, so I knew that I wanted to stay within the VA Health Care System for my PGY2 year. When I interviewed at the Columbia VA Mental Health PGY2 program, I found that this program has several things that perfectly aligned with what I was looking for in a residency program. The program, itself, offers a wide variety of rotations in both inpatient and outpatient areas that I knew would allow me to improve and develop my clinical skills and knowledge. Each preceptor is incredibly well-trained and dedicated to providing each resident with an excellent clinical experience on their respective rotations. I really enjoy the fact that there are 7 total PGY1 and PGY2 residents this year, and it would allow me to work and train with several other residents throughout my residency year. Overall, I found that this program genuinely cares about its residents and does everything it can to help them succeed and become well-prepared, practicing pharmacists.”

Brooke Balenger, PGY1: “Coming from North Carolina, where pharmacists can be Clinical Pharmacist Practitioners (CPP), I knew I wanted to be at a residency where pharmacists can work freely within their own scope of practice. After learning more at the VA in general, I knew this is where I wanted to be due to pharmacists having more autonomy within their practice in comparison to pharmacists at other health care facilities. The Columbia VA’s PGY1 stood out to me mainly for the rotations they offered such as transitions of care/endocrinology, both inpatient and outpatient psychiatry, infectious disease/antimicrobial stewardship, etc. The Columbia VA is a place where you can get great exposure to both inpatient and outpatient settings or concentrate in one area if you are more interested in that. I also really loved the fact there are two other PGY1s that you are able to go through the year with. I knew I needed to have a sense of comradery both with multiple PGY1s as well as having PGY2s to look up to and get advice from.”

What is your favorite thing about the program?

Glenda Carlton, PGY2 Psychiatry: “My favorite thing about the program is the support given from the preceptors and the residency programs directors. They sincerely have your best interests at heart and are dedicated to your growth. I feel that I am challenged to my fullest potential in this program and I look forward to growing both personally and professionally throughout the year. Whether it’s related to staffing, rotation(s), policy, or management related tasks, I learn something new every day. Considering, I am new to the VA system, having a team that is always willing and happy to assist has made this learning experience and transition tremendously better.”

Matt Pietro, PGY1: “As a resident from New York my favorite aspect of this program has been the warm South Carolina welcome everyone in and around the pharmacy has given me. All of the staff here have been so friendly and supportive throughout my residency so far! I really feel at home when I arrive at work every day and that is a testament to the fantastic culture we have here at the Columbia VA.”
**What has been your favorite rotation so far?**

**Madison Hardin, PGY2 Ambulatory Care:** “This is a really tough question to answer because the Columbia VA offers so many unique learning experiences, with exceptional and dedicated preceptors! However, if I had to select my favorite, it would be between two rotation experiences: Primary Care (PACT) and Primary Care Mental Health Integration (PCMHI). The PACT experience allows for the opportunity to help manage a variety of outpatient disease states including diabetes, hypertension, COPD, dyslipidemia, hypothyroidism, etc. By engaging in tele-medicine appointments, residents promote optimal patient outcomes related to treatment. Additionally, during the PGY1, eight-week PACT, residents continue follow-up with patients, providing the benefit of building trusted relationships and observing patient progress and the determination to adjust treatment, if necessary. As a PGY2, I enjoyed my PCMHI rotation because I have a strong passion for addressing mental health challenges among our veteran population. Serving in this important role places responsibility on residents to become current with psychiatry guidelines for addressing such challenges as anxiety including PTSD, depression, and insomnia with effective medication management (drug initiation, titrations, cross-tapers, etc.). The aforementioned reasons along with the rotations being challenging and in line with my interests made these two rotations at the top of my list.”

**Andrew Daugherty, PGY2 Psychiatry:** “It’s really difficult to choose just one rotation because I’ve had such positive experiences so far, but I would have to say that my favorite rotation has been Inpatient Psychiatry! Clinical pharmacists have full provider status and our own scope of practice in both inpatient and outpatient settings at the VA. We are a fully-integrated, vital part of the treatment team, which allows us to be more directly involved in every patient’s care. On the inpatient unit, we not only manage all acute psychiatric problems for each patient, but also provide comprehensive care and recommendations for every active disease state (diabetes, hypertension, COPD, etc.) that the patient may have. I’ve found that our physicians and other providers are very accepting of our recommendations and rely on our medication expertise to provide the best possible care for our veterans. Working as a pharmacist in mental health allows you to follow the progress of each patient from start to finish and you get to directly see how your recommendations improve both their physical and mental health. I think that working and training in Inpatient Psychiatry has been the most rewarding experience I’ve had by far!”

**What are the staffing requirements at the Columbia VA? What duties are you responsible for while staffing?**

**Amee Shah, PGY2 Ambulatory Care:** “Residents staff in the outpatient pharmacy every 3rd or 4th weekend depending on the rotation of residents and every 3rd or 4th Friday evening (5-9PM). During the weekend there are 2 tours (8AM-4:30PM and 12:30-9PM). Responsibilities during these staffing shifts include medication counseling, medication reconciliations upon patient admission and discharge, and processing and dispensing of outpatient medications for emergency patients.”

**What support do you all have as residents? Are residents assigned a mentor?**

**Alex Waddell, PGY1:** “We have a great deal of support as residents. In the beginning of our residency we were assigned mentors for different subject areas, such as a general program mentor, teaching certificate mentor, etc. While we have specific mentors, I have found that different preceptors, as well as other pharmacists and professionals here at the Columbia VA are more than happy to help in any way they can! The atmosphere is very welcoming and no question is too silly to ask. We also have regular check ins that assess for burnout and have strategies available to help if that should occur.”
What do residents do outside the program?

Maddie Hardin, PGY2 Ambulatory Care: “The residency class takes a little time once a month for “Resident Date Night”. This provides the opportunity to step away from typical responsibilities of our residency program and enjoy and learn about one another. Meeting for dinner and trying different restaurants is always a good choice for date night. It also gives us a chance to become familiar with Columbia. Aside from restaurants, some of our best dinners have been hosted by our Residency Coordinator. Those evenings have a “being at home” feel to them, which is always nice. To mix it up, residents have been known to enjoy the fun, laid-back atmosphere of the various breweries in the area. Game night might be in order to keep it simple. During the holidays, many of us are away from our families and loved ones so last year we had a small Christmas party that included the “Dirty Santa” game. Depending on interests, some of us gather outside of planned date nights to just watch TV shows (big fan of The Bachelor). Residency is busy but we always make time to hangout for some down time.”

What teaching and/or precepting opportunities are available in your program?

Glenda Carlton, PGY2 Psychiatry: “During my PGY1 residency, I completed a teaching certificate program offered through the University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy. As a PGY2 resident, I am able to teach and precept pharmacy students and a pharmacy resident on the inpatient psychiatry rotation. This year, I am given two opportunities to precept students on a 6-week rotation in the fall and in the spring. In addition, I assist with serving as a mentor for the student(s) that my co-resident may be precepting. When precepting, I have been able to use and implement the four preceptor roles, including instructing, modeling, coaching, and facilitating. As a preceptor, my role expands to a variety of things including teaching, leading topic discussions, assisting students with case presentations, journal clubs, patient documentation, and patient education. I thoroughly enjoy all the opportunities to precept and I look forward to helping other learners just as others have helped me.”

Amee Shah, PGY2 Psychiatry: “As a PGY1 resident last year I completed the Clinical Teaching Certificate offered through the University of South Carolina College of Pharmacy. This comprehensive program combines a variety of didactic seminars, active teaching opportunities, and precepting activities. There are 2 tracks within this program to choose from and all of the activities within them can be tailored to the resident’s interests and career goals. There is ample opportunity to gain experience teaching in different settings (i.e., teaching a full lecture, leading small group discussions, facilitation of clinical labs, etc.) at the residency site during rotations/longitudinal experiences as well as the College of Pharmacy.”

What is the “flipped” research model?

Brooke Balenger, PGY1: “Flipped research is where the resident inherits a research project that has already been Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved. Research is a longitudinal learning experience where in the first half of the year the resident works on their inherited project and the second half of the year they get to create their own project that next year’s residents will inherit. Doing research via a flipped research model, gives the resident better insight when starting their new project. It also helps a ton when the resident is new to our facility where they might not know what exactly would be a good research idea/what has done in the past. Lastly, it allows for residents to establish good working relationship with their Primary Investigator (PI) or research mentor at the beginning of the year.”
**How is the Columbia VA handling COVID-19 regarding the residency experience?**

**Matt Pietro, PGY1:** “The COVID-19 pandemic has been an opportunity for growth for all residency programs across the country. Personally, I feel that the Columbia VA PGY1 program has been extremely proactive in terms of implementing telephone and VA Video Connect services allowing us residents to continue to provide exceptional veteran centered care throughout the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic all of the pharmacy residents have been practicing on-site allowing us to continue to gain valuable clinical practice skills. With the incorporation of Microsoft Teams, we are able to video chat and message preceptors at a moment’s notice which has helped to improve our overall efficiency in providing timely patient care. In terms of work environment, the Columbia VA administration has been very hands-on in enforcing surgical mask use, handwashing, and social distancing which is something that I personally appreciate and makes me feel safe and comfortable when providing patient care.”

**What are your favorite things to do in Columbia?**

**Maddie Hardin, PGY2 Ambulatory Care:** “One of my favorite things to do in Columbia is go to Soda City on a Saturday morning. It’s a unique outdoor marketplace in downtown Columbia on Main Street. Generally, there are about 150 vendors each week offering freshly made lemonade, delicious food, fresh flower bouquets, unique art and handcrafted jewelry, and so much more. It’s a great place to find gifts for holidays and special occasions and it’s dog friendly! Aside from Soda City, there’s a lot of great food and local breweries in Columbia!”

**Alex Waddell, PGY1:** “Columbia has a variety of fun things to do! We have a great restaurant, brewery, and art scene downtown, especially in an area known as the Vista. There you can find a little bit of everything, with cuisine from different areas. There’s Congaree National Park, where you can enjoy nature and kayak, as well as different museums like the Columbia Art Museum and the South Carolina State Museum. As Maddie mentioned, Soda City Market is a true treasure we have in Columbia, as well as Riverbanks Zoo. We also have a local baseball team, the Fireflies, whose games are always fun to support!”