

VA Boston Social Work Internship in Neurology

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When I obtained the position as a Social Work Intern at VA Boston, I was thrilled because I knew it would be an excellent learning opportunity. I have a particular interest in the veteran population and have heard nothing but good things from previous interns placed at VA Boston sites. Little did I know that I would be given a unique opportunity to work in the Neurology Department, specifically within the Epilepsy and Psychogenic Non-Epileptic Seizure (PNES) Clinic.

Dr. Aneeta Saxena, Epileptologist (VA Boston Director of Multi-Disciplinary PNES Clinic and Epilepsy Attending) reached out to my supervisor Lola Baird, LICSW (TBI & Polytrauma Coordinator) requesting a social work perspective at the PNES multi-disciplinary rounds on Tuesday mornings. I agreed to attend not entirely knowing what to expect but hoping to get any additional experience I could. On my first day, I was asked for my opinion on a clinical case and then subsequently invited back to contribute to rounds and attend the clinic as a social work trainee.

My role in the PNES Clinic was to review the charts of the veterans to assess their needs and barriers to care, as well as to help with access to resources and mental health treatment. In the clinic, I had the opportunity to be part of a team of neurologists, psychiatry residents, neuropsychologists, and neuropsychology fellows. I also had the opportunity to share my perspective as a social work trainee. I worked shoulder-to-shoulder with physicians and nurses to provide the best treatment for veterans. In addition to all of these great opportunities, the Neurology Department requested that I provide the same short-term therapeutic support and various levels of case management to other clinics.

Learning different perspectives on veteran care while also being asked my social work perspective was an absolute privilege. I was pleased that I was included as a member of the clinical team from the outset of my training. Furthermore, I was encouraged to advocate for this unique training experience to be available to future social work interns. I learned a great deal through working with the Neurology Department—and this experience is only one aspect of my internship. I am also able to practice individual psychotherapy and group therapy in the General Mental Health Clinic, and to provide case management within the Polytrauma/TBI Clinic.

My clinical experience was limited prior to coming to VA Boston, but after this rich and well-rounded experience I feel I have truly become a social worker.