



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

## Clinical Psychology Postdoctoral Fellowship

### VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

Director of Clinical Training  
Behavioral Health Service Line (116A-U)  
University Drive C  
Pittsburgh PA 15240-1001  
(412) 360-1290

**Application Due Date: December 20, 2023**

### Accreditation Status

The postdoctoral fellowship in **Clinical Psychology** is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of the American Psychological Association. We are extremely proud of our training programs and their accreditation by the American Psychological Association. Questions related to the program's accredited status should be directed to the Commission on Accreditation:

Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation  
American Psychological Association  
750 1st Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002  
Phone: (202) 336-5979 / E-mail: [apaaccred@apa.org](mailto:apaaccred@apa.org)  
Web: [www.apa.org/ed/accreditation](http://www.apa.org/ed/accreditation)

### VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System and Psychology Staff

The VAPHS is a 500-patient bed, joint commission accredited facility comprised of two primary campuses. The University Drive campus, near the University of Pittsburgh, is the medical-surgical facility and includes specialty medical clinics, inpatient medicine units, outpatient behavioral health clinics, three inpatient psychiatry units, and the Center for the Treatment of Addictive Disorders. This campus also includes a referral center for liver and renal transplants and regional cardiac surgery, bariatric, and oncology services. A Fisher House is located at the University Drive campus to support Veterans' families and our Research Office Building houses a wet lab, animal facility, investigational drug service, and clinical research trials. The H. J. Heinz III campus includes the 188 patient-bed Community Living Center, Veteran Recovery Center, Neuropsychology outpatient clinic, primary care clinic, and other clinical services to include dental and rehabilitation medicine. These two campuses are within 10 miles of each other. In July 2023, the majority of our primary care clinics transitioned to our new Monroeville clinic, located in an eastern suburb of Pittsburgh. This large outpatient clinic includes integrated primary and behavioral health care along with specialty and diagnostic services such as rehabilitation, optometry, imaging, lab, and acupuncture. In addition to these two campuses and our Monroeville

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*(Updated September 2023)*

outpatient clinic , the VAPHS also includes five community-based outpatient clinics (CBOC's) in our catchment area (4 in Pennsylvania and 1 in eastern Ohio) to provide integrated primary and behavioral health care to our Veterans residing in more rural locations. We are proud of our National Centers of Clinical Excellence for renal, dialysis, women Veterans health care, and Geriatric Center of Excellence.

In FY2022, VAPHS provided care to 84,910 Veterans and conducted 753,245 outpatient visits, including 89,128 women Veteran appointments. The VAPHS is increasing services via telehealth technology and conducted 57,739 telemental health visits in FY2022. Veterans span the cohorts from Persian Gulf & Post 9/11 to WWII. Given the large catchment area of the VAPHS to include western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, and parts of West Virginia, our Veteran population includes a mix of urban and rural Veterans. The VAPHS serves a diverse Veteran population, including racial, ethnic, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic diversity. As part of the VAPHS commitment to diversity, we have been and continue to be identified as a LGBT healthcare leader for the past several years in the Human Rights Campaign's Healthcare Equality Index. In FY2022, the VAPHS employed 4,395 employees, 25% of whom are Veterans.

All staff and services at the VAPHS are organized into “service lines.” The fellowship program is located within the Behavioral Health Service Line. The majority of psychologists at VAPHS are assigned to the Behavioral Health Service Line. The VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System currently employs 55 full-time staff psychologists in Behavioral Health, most of whom are involved in the training program. Our psychology staff has been increasing over the past few years to meet the growing demand for behavioral health services in our increasing VA population. Our staff psychologists' backgrounds, interests, and current activities are diverse. We have supervisors from a variety of graduate programs with varying lengths of tenure at the VAPHS. In addition to their clinical work, our staff psychologists hold many important leadership positions, such as team leaders and medical center committee chairpersons. Our staff members are committed to providing evidence-based treatment approaches to our Veterans. Most supervisors have completed VA certification and have provider status in at least one evidence-based psychotherapy and some are VA trainers for evidence-based psychotherapies (refer to list of training staff for specific information). Our psychology training programs (practicum, doctoral internship, and postdoctoral fellowship) are part of our VA's educational mission which includes many other training programs, such as medicine, social work, physical therapy, occupational therapy, chaplaincy, speech language pathology, and nursing. Our vibrant educational affiliation with the University of Pittsburgh allows trainees from many disciplines to participate in interdisciplinary training at our medical center.

## **Program Philosophy, Training Model, Program Goals, & Objectives**

The mission of the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System in training clinical psychology postdoctoral fellows is to provide supervised clinical and scholarly opportunities to selected postdoctoral students wishing to develop advanced skills in clinical psychology with a focus in Interdisciplinary Care, PTSD, and Substance Use Disorders. The aim of our training program is to produce psychologists with advanced training in the science and practice of clinical psychology for careers in VA or other health service settings. Thus, the focus of training is on developing advanced competence and it is expected that fellows will possess entry-level practice skills in psychology at the start of the training year. During the postdoctoral year, fellows will gain advanced competence through their supervised clinical and scholarly activities.

Individual supervision sessions at minimum of two hours per week with staff psychologists will promote an integration of case conceptualization, clinical findings, testing results, and psychological interventions. The fellowship program will be truly interdisciplinary in that a portion of clinical activities will occur when working not only with psychologists, but also a variety of other healthcare professionals. Our training philosophy reflects the scholar-practitioner model in that fellows are expected to develop proficiency in both clinical work and scholarly thinking. Consistent with this model, fellows will become familiar with evidence-based practice and will integrate scholarly research and critical thinking into clinical practice. It is expected that, by the conclusion of the fellowship year, fellows will develop advanced skills within the following core competency areas: Integration of science and practice; Individual and cultural diversity; Assessment; Intervention; Consultation and interprofessional/interdisciplinary skills; Professional values, attitudes and behaviors: Supervision skills.

### ***Clinical Diversity***

The VA Pittsburgh Fellowship is strongly committed to both training in diversity and individual differences as well as the recruitment of fellows from various cultures and diverse groups. To help increase multicultural competency and sensitivity, fellows have the opportunity to work with Veterans of various ages, gender identity, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and race as well as with Veterans with physical disabilities. Fellows are also immersed in diversity topics in seminars and case conferences and have the opportunity to tailor the diversity seminar series to their personal interests. Fellows may also become members of the Diversity subcommittee of the Clinical Training Committee, the mission of which is to provide training and educational opportunities as they relate to issues of diversity to Psychology staff and trainees. As part of this subcommittee, fellows may serve as co-chair of the committee and participate in a diversity project, an example of which includes creating a provider's quick guide to asking culturally sensitive questions for dissemination to VAPHS medical staff. The committee also strives to improve recruitment and retention of Psychology staff and trainees from diverse backgrounds. Fellows have also become members of our Interdisciplinary Transgender Treatment Team with active participation in meetings and special events and are encouraged to attend our psychology monthly DEI huddles.

### **COVID-19 Training Modifications**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created numerous personal and professional challenges for all of us. The challenges facing all training programs are complex, further complicated by the fluidity and uncertainty of the pandemic. It is difficult for us to confidently predict and/or describe the impact of COVID-19 on our training program for the 2023-2024 training year. Our trainees are currently on-site full-time with private offices assigned to them. Paramount is the importance of maintaining safety for our trainees. Fellows will likely continue to provide a significant component of behavioral health treatment via telehealth modalities, primarily Veteran Video Connect (VVC), although the number of Veterans requesting face-to-face appointments is increasing. If providing face-to-face services, appropriate PPE is available and guaranteed. Supervision will include a blend of face-to-face and synchronous tele-supervision, although most didactics continue to be offered via virtual modalities due to logistical challenges. We will be happy to describe our current modifications during our virtual interviews and to address any concerns and/or questions regarding our COVID-19 modifications. Our dedication to

providing high quality training continues despite the COVID-19 challenges and we are confident that our training program can provide the clinical experiences and supervision to facilitate the personal and professional development of our fellows.

## **Training Experiences and Program Structure**

### **Training Rotations**

#### **Interprofessional Care Focus**

During the 12-month training year, the fellow will function as an active member of interdisciplinary treatment teams in settings across VAPHS. The focus of the fellowship is on learning to deliver psychological services, including assessment, treatment, and consultation, as a Behavioral Medicine expert on Medical Specialty care teams. The rotation includes a standard major emphasis, and a minor emphasis which can be selected by the Fellow from available options. For the major emphasis, Fellows will receive training in **Psychosocial Oncology** and **Transplant Psychology**.

As part of the VA Pittsburgh Cancer Center, fellows will provide assessment and treatment to Veterans of all eras with any type of cancer. Fellows will attend weekly interdisciplinary meetings and develop competency in providing expert consultation to the team which includes physicians, nurse navigators, nurses, social work, clinical pharmacy, and palliative care. Clinical activities include: psychodiagnostic interviews, brief cognitive assessment, individual psychotherapy, group psychotherapy, couples/family therapy, and (occasionally) capacity assessment. Common problems include sleep complaints, pain, adjustment issues, depressed mood, irritability, anxiety, concerns about dying, specific fears related to treatments or diagnostic procedures, and impact of cancer on relationships. Therapy modalities may include CBT, MI, ACT, IPT, and others. As part of VA Pittsburgh Transplant teams, the fellow will develop competency in psychosocial evaluation for solid organ transplant including liver and kidney. The fellow will have the opportunity to evaluate both organ recipients and donors and to provide expert consultation to the Transplant Team. Opportunities for working at bedside with medical inpatients also exist.

Options for the minor focus are described below and may include Behavioral Sleep Medicine, Psychology Pain Management Clinic, Bariatrics, and Transgender Healthcare Clinics.

**Behavioral Sleep Medicine:** Fellows will learn how to conduct specialized assessments and to provide evidence-based treatment within the Sleep Clinic. Fellows will become skilled in areas including CBT for Insomnia (CBT-I), Nightmare therapies, PAP adherence, PAP desensitization, hypersomnia, and circadian rhythm disorders.

**Psychology Pain Management Clinic:** Fellows will work alongside various disciplines in the Pain Clinic and Interdisciplinary Pain Rehab Program to provide comprehensive care to veterans with chronic pain. Emphasis will be placed on specialized pain assessment and provision of group-based interventions. Individual treatment modalities may include CBT- and ACT- based approaches for chronic pain

**Bariatrics Clinic:** Fellows will provide presurgical evaluations for bariatric surgery as well as related consultative services. Opportunities may exist to provide brief treatment to enhance

readiness/appropriateness for surgery and promote success post-surgery. Fellows will also have the opportunity to participate in interdisciplinary team meetings.

**Transgender Healthcare:** Fellows will function as active members of the VAPHS Interdisciplinary Transgender Treatment Team, which meets regularly to provide clinical care and outreach to transgender and gender non-conforming Veterans. Primary clinical duties typically include pre-treatment and pre-surgical psychosocial assessments for gender-affirming medical care. Gender-related therapy and support group facilitation opportunities may also be available.

The primary supervisors for this focus area are: Drs. Rebecca Akcakaya, Jody Tomko, and Patrick Whitmoyer. Additional psychologists in Behavioral Medicine include Dr. Maria El-Tahch and Dr. Jessica Kieta.

### **PTSD Focus**

The PTSD Fellow functions as a junior colleague in the Trauma Recovery Clinic (TRC). The TRC is a specialized outpatient interdisciplinary team comprised of psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, nurse practitioners, and support personnel. The TRC is a nationally designated PTSD Clinical Team (PCT) and is designed to provide specialty care for PTSD. The TRC operates from a model that is recovery-oriented and consistent with the clinical practice guidelines for PTSD. The primary function of the TRC is to evaluate and treat veterans with PTSD as a result of all types of trauma across the lifespan, including combat, sexual trauma, childhood abuse, accidents, natural disasters, and other Criterion A traumatic stressors. VAPHS' MST coordinator is a staff psychologist in the TRC. The TRC offers assessment for PTSD and trauma-related disorders, provides time-limited/evidence-based therapy, and engages in ongoing measurement-based care. The Fellow is fully involved in working on this interdisciplinary team to provide a wide range of outpatient services which include initial diagnostic evaluations, treatment planning, and individual and group psychotherapy.

Initial diagnostic assessments in the TRC consist of comprehensive psychosocial evaluations utilizing evidence-based case conceptualization approaches with a focus on differential diagnosis and consideration of multicultural factors/intersecting identities. Fellows will learn and refine skills in empirically supported treatments for PTSD such as Prolonged Exposure (PE) and Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT). Fellows may also learn and deliver Written Exposure Therapy (WET), Skills Training in Affective and Interpersonal Regulation (STAIR), and/or Cognitive Behavioral Conjoint Therapy for PTSD (CBCT-PTSD). Fellows will have the opportunity to become a VA recognized CPT provider following completion of the CPT regional training and 6 months of CPT consultation calls. In addition to EBPs for PTSD, Fellows will deliver evidence-based interventions for trauma-related sequelae and complex presentations. Depending on the training goals of the Fellow, this may include STAIR, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Depression (CBT-D), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBTi), and/or cognitive-behavioral protocols for panic disorder and generalized anxiety disorder. Fellows will co-facilitate psychotherapy groups in the clinic, which may include Anger Management, STAIR, Unified Protocol, and Coping Skills groups. Fellows may also co-facilitate Seeking Safety, a joint group with the substance use clinic (CTAD).

Additionally, the Fellow will provide clinical supervision of a psychology intern. Fellow supervision of the TRC intern would include evidence-based therapy for PTSD (PE or CPT) and initial evaluations in the

clinic. Supervision of supervision will involve joint review of audio taped sessions, provision of written feedback, and in-depth discussion of topics related to supervision of trauma-focused clinical work, such as use of case-conceptualization to guide clinical decision making, management of affect, and self-care. The Fellow will regularly present in TRC didactics including weekly PTSD Case Conference/PTSD Journal Club and the TRC interdisciplinary treatment meeting. Additional consultation regarding PTSD EBP implementation is available through the monthly PTSD EBP consultation meeting.

Supervisors: Drs. Sarah Butterworth, Ashley Gill and Michael Rosen

### **Substance Use Disorders Focus**

During the 12-month training year, the fellow will function as an active member of the interdisciplinary treatment team in the Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders (CTAD). The goal of the training year is to develop mastery of assessing and treating a wide variety of substance use and other addictive disorders with co-occurring psychiatric, medical and social concerns. Treatment modalities include individual and group psychotherapy as well as brief motivational interviewing sessions. Fellows are expected to carry a diverse individual caseload including patients with complex diagnostic profiles (e.g., co-occurring addictive and personality disorders). The fellow is expected to be flexible in their approach to psychotherapy including using evidence-based practices when appropriate. Fellows can expect to carry some longer-term patients over the course of the year which afford the opportunity to hone core therapeutic skills. Fellows can expect to gain exposure to motivational interviewing which is at the center of our philosophical approach to the treatment of addictive disorders. The fellow will have the opportunity to train in multiple evidence-based practices including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Substance Use Disorders, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Seeking Safety and Cognitive Processing Therapy.

The fellow will provide core clinical services across each of the three clinical components within CTAD, which include the Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program, the Outpatient Recovery and Aftercare Clinic, and the Opioid Substitution Therapy Program. The fellow will complete diagnostic interviews, formulate treatment plans, conduct individual and group psychotherapy, and provide consultative and adjunct services to other Behavioral Health Teams and Medical Specialty Outpatient Clinics. Fellows also may provide case management services to veterans participating in the residential rehabilitation program. Fellows will be asked to develop at least one therapy group that conforms to best-practice principles and evidence-based techniques. The fellow will work with at least two primary clinical supervisors in CTAD during the training year in the above settings. Fellows will have one primary supervisor for six months and then switch to another primary supervisor for the final six months.

Supervisors include Drs. Leigh Gemmell, Susan Jefferson, and Christina Muthard-White.

### **Supervision Responsibilities/Training**

One of the many strengths of our fellowship training program is our commitment to training fellows in supervision competency. Development of supervisory skills is often overlooked in clinical training, resulting in psychologists providing supervision without any formal training in or supervision of supervisory skills. As part of their professional development as psychologists, all fellows will have the opportunity to provide supervision to psychology doctoral interns, under the supervision of a staff psychologist. Fellows will be required to provide one hour of supervision per week to an intern. In

addition, fellows will be expected to attend the Supervisor Development Series, a program designed for the staff psychologists to discuss supervisory issues and refine supervisory skills, and receive supervision training during the Professional Development Seminar series. Furthermore, fellows will attend the monthly supervisor meetings and will serve on the Clinical Training Committee by attending quarterly meetings and assisting with the selection of interns and fellows.

## **Didactics**

All fellows will participate in the 1-hour weekly Fellowship Seminar Series. This seminar series provides the opportunity for fellows to meet during the week and share experiences and knowledge of clinical psychology. The seminar series includes:

1. **Professional Development Seminar:** Dr. Pasquale facilitates this seminar which incorporates lecture, discussion, and reading on supervisory development, ethical issues, and professional growth.
2. **Fellowship Case Conference:** During this case conference, fellows rotate presenting a case with staff psychologists rotating as facilitators.
3. **Fellowship Seminar:** Psychology staff present lectures/discussions on a professional topic in clinical psychology.
4. **Supervisor Development Series:** This quarterly seminar is attended by fellows and staff psychologists. A scholarly article regarding supervision of psychology trainees is chosen for discussion during each meeting.
1. **Diversity Seminars:** Fellows will attend fellow-directed diversity seminars. Each fellow will select a diversity topic and present either a case example and/or scholarly literature to facilitate discussion.

In addition to the above seminars designed for all fellows, fellows will attend at least one additional hour of weekly didactics within their emphasis area, as described:

### **Interprofessional Care Focus**

1. **Behavioral Medicine Journal Club:** During this monthly journal club, fellows, interns, and staff psychologists rotate presenting an article and case presentation in the field of behavioral medicine for review and discussion.
2. **Primary Care Journal Club & Case Conference:** During this monthly journal club and case conference, fellows, interns, and staff psychologists rotate presenting an article and case presentation in the field of primary care psychology for review and discussion.
3. **VISN 4 CMO Lunch and Learn Series:** The fellow may participate in this once monthly regional didactic call.
4. **Minor specific didactics:** The fellow is encouraged to participate in minor-specific weekly/monthly didactic offerings.

### **PTSD Focus**

1. **PTSD Case Conference:** Weekly case conference attended by PTSD staff psychologists and trainees focusing on assessment and treatment of PTSD.

2. **PTSD Journal Club:** Monthly journal club during which scholarly articles related to PTSD are discussed with an emphasis on clinical application of the research.
3. **PTSD EBP Consultation Conference:** This informal conference meets monthly and is attended by interested staff and psychology trainees and provides the opportunity to discuss clinical work utilizing EBPs for PTSD, including CPT, PE, EMDR, WET, and CBCT-PTSD.
4. **CPT Training:** The fellow will be able to participate in a 3-day VA CPT training. Following the training, the fellow will participate in a weekly consultation call for 6 months and will complete 2 cases using CPT to fulfill requirements to become a VA-recognized CPT provider.

### **Substance Use Disorders Focus**

1. **Substance Use Disorder Seminar:** Monthly seminar series facilitated by the CTAD staff which may include presentations of recent SUD research, best practices in SUD treatment, case presentation, or journal club.
2. **SUD Case Conference:** This conference meets monthly and focuses on assessment and intervention of substance use disorders. The case conference is attended by psychology interns, psychology fellows, and psychology staff. Other members (psychiatry, nurses, social workers, etc.) from the CTAD team may also attend this case conference.

## **Supervision and Evaluation**

The psychology postdoctoral fellowship supervisors are dedicated to providing quality supervision to fellows. All supervisory sessions are intended to offer meaningful feedback to the fellow in order to increase understanding of his/her clinical strengths and weaknesses and to facilitate professional growth. As aids in the supervisory process, digital recording, direct observation, and co-therapy may be used. While the primary focus of supervisory sessions is on the development of clinical skills, other issues such as administrative dynamics, professional ethics, and cultural issues are often addressed. Fellows receive a minimum of two hours of formal individual supervision weekly. Supervisors are also available on an as needed basis beyond the regularly scheduled times of supervision.

Progress towards the attainment of the training goals is determined by means of regularly scheduled evaluations. Feedback between fellows and supervisors is on going. Monthly evaluations are discussed informally with the fellow and at a monthly supervisors' meeting chaired by the Director of Clinical Training. A mid-rotation evaluation occurs at the 3-month and 9-month time points with the supervisor reviewing the fellow's progress thus far in terms of the specific skills defined within each core competency area. At the conclusion of each six-month rotation, a formal evaluation of the fellow's progress is made. This evaluation is discussed with the fellow prior to submission to the Director of Clinical Training for inclusion in the fellow's training record. In conjunction with the supervisor's evaluation of the fellow, each fellow is asked to evaluate the supervisor. Fellows are encouraged to evaluate their own performance and that of the fellowship critically so that the evaluation process is not merely unidirectional.

## **Requirements for Completion**

For fellows to remain in good standing in the program, fellows must achieve at least a majority of ratings of "3" in each competency area on the rotation evaluation form at mid-year, indicating that competency



for each skill item is at the level beyond the start of the postdoctoral training year, but below that expected at the conclusion of the postdoctoral training year. In addition, fellows must not engage in any ethical violations to maintain good standing in the program.

To successfully complete the fellowship program, fellows must achieve the following requirements:

1. A fellow must complete the entire year of training (i.e., 2080 hours).
2. A fellow must be in “good standing” and removed from any probationary status.
3. By the conclusion of the training year, a fellow must achieve a rating of “4” for every competency skill in each competency domain on the final Evaluation of Fellow Performance, indicating that a fellow has demonstrated advanced competency for this skill defined as the ability to generalize skills and knowledge to novel and/or complex situations, demonstrate expertise in the broad range of clinical and professional activities, and demonstrate ability to serve as an expert resource to other professionals in these domains.

## **Facility and Training Resources**

All fellows are assigned an individual office with most offices located in the clinic where the fellow works. Offices are generally in close proximity to supervisors to promote informal supervision and consultation. All fellows have a personal computer in their office with access to the computerized patient record system, e-mail, Internet, and Microsoft software. The fellows are also given access to the VA voice mail system. Psychological and neuropsychological testing equipment is available to fellows through our psychology technicians as well as part of the assessment software in the computerized patient record system. To assist with development of psychotherapy and supervision skills, fellows have access to USB compact microphones to record sessions onto computers for supervision purposes. Medical libraries are located at both divisions and fellows have access to journals, interlibrary loans, and computer-based literature searches. Our medical librarians are extremely helpful in assisting staff and fellows to retrieve selected journal articles and books from other sources.

Fellows may park on both campuses; parking is free of cost. The VA medical center also operates a shuttle system that interns may utilize to travel between divisions for meetings and didactics.

The stipend for the training year is \$53,661. The start date is tentatively 8/26/2024. Fellows can elect to participate in federal health insurance plans. Fellows earn annual leave (personal time off) and sick leave at the rate of 4 hours every two weeks. Maternity/Paternity leave is also available through use of sick leave, annual leave, and then Leave Without Pay (LWOP), with any LWOP hours to be made up at the end of the training year. In addition to the annual leave and sick leave, we grant time away from the medical center for fellows to attend approved training activities and conferences, including taking the psychology licensure examination. Although there is no limit to the amount of approved time away from the medical center that a fellow may use, permission will only be granted when a fellow is making satisfactory progress in meeting the requirements of his/her rotation.

Given research demonstrating the value of mentorship in professional development, the Diversity subcommittees assists fellows to identify a mentor from the psychology staff. The selected mentor will not be in an evaluative role with the fellow and discussions within the mentorship relationship are considered confidential.

## **Administrative Policies and Procedures**

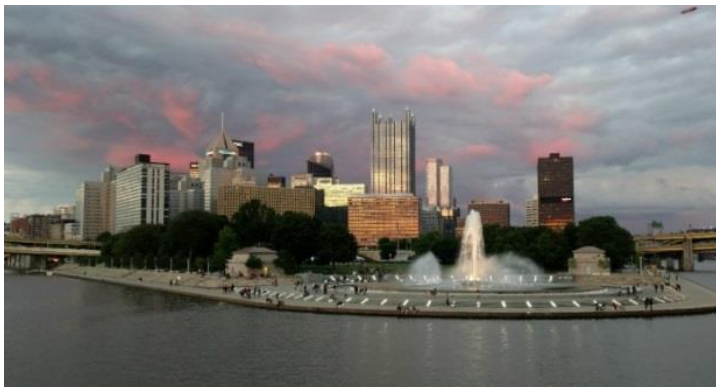
During orientation to the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, fellows are provided a training manual that contains important policies and information for the fellowship program as well as for the medical center. Included in the training manual is our grievance and due process policy concerning identification and resolution of problems arising during the internship year. Copies of all evaluation forms are also included in the training manual. Copies of our evaluation forms and grievance policy are available to interested applicants upon request.

## **Trainees**

Since the inception of our postdoctoral program in 2000, we have accepted fellows from clinical and counseling Ph.D. and Psy.D. programs. Fellows have completed internships in various VA medical centers, including our own, as well as other programs, such as state hospitals and psychiatry departments within university medical centers. The majority of our fellows have accepted staff psychologist positions at VA Medical Centers (including our own) after completion of the fellowship year. Many of our fellows have enjoyed the transition to Pittsburgh and have remained in the Pittsburgh area, suggesting that Pittsburgh is a desirable city in which to reside!

During exit interviews with fellows over the past several years, fellows have consistently identified three strengths of our fellowship program. First, fellows have commented that both the breadth and depth of training experiences are a significant strength of our program. Although fellows tailor their training in a specific focus area, fellows have commented that the breadth of training experiences in each focus area over the course of the year is significant. Fellows have also commented that the training has broadened their skills in clinical psychology beyond the focus area. Second, fellows have consistently described both the quality and quantity of supervision as strengths. Fellows have remarked that supervisors are always available for scheduled supervision in addition to informal consultation and emergency supervision. Our supervisors have been described as enthusiastic, dedicated, and invested in training and the professional growth of fellows. Finally, fellows have noted that the training they received in supervision significantly increased their supervision competency and is a noteworthy strength of this training program.

## **Local Information**



Pittsburgh is located in southwestern Pennsylvania, where the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers meet to form the Ohio River. Contrary to popular belief, Pittsburgh is no longer the industrial steel town of the 50's and 60's. In 2017 WalletHub compared 62 of the largest U.S. cities and Pittsburgh ranked #3 of the best cities in which to live and CNBC

named Pittsburgh the 2nd best city for millennials in 2017. Also in 2017, MONEY named the East Liberty and Lawrenceville neighborhoods as the #1 coolest neighborhoods in America! The downtown area and riverfront have undergone massive renovation, and several vibrant sub-communities have emerged over the past decade. An exciting blend of old and new, Pittsburgh is a city of history, business, culture, research, medicine, sports, and recreation that pleasantly surprises newcomers!

The largest metropolitan area in the Ohio Valley and Appalachia, Pittsburgh is a growing city. “The Steel City” has 446 bridges, creating a unique urban terrain within a beautiful natural valley. The city is home to numerous diverse cultural groups, and offers a variety of authentic world cuisines within our various districts. For lovers of the culinary arts, you will find a variety of coffee shops, bakeries, and restaurants. Rich in American history, Pittsburgh also has a growing art and cultural scene. It is the home of the Andy Warhol Museum, the Carnegie library system, and has numerous universities and colleges such as University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon, Duquesne, Carlow, and Chatham, creating a constant influx of energy, creative thought, and activity. There are also a wide variety of entertainment opportunities, including events at PPG Paints Arena, local music venues, as well as Broadway shows in the downtown theatre district. The city is ideal for families, with a local zoo, aquarium, the Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, and the National Aviary. Sports enthusiasts will be welcomed into the loyal hometown community, supporting the Pirates, Steelers, and Penguins. With its unique location, Pittsburgh also offers easy accessibility to a variety of city and state parks, water sports, caving systems, and wildlife preserves, creating a multitude of activities for naturalists.

For more information about our exciting city and the diversity of “the ‘Burgh”, view these websites:

- [Visit Pittsburgh | Official Tourism Site for Pittsburgh, PA](#)
- [PUMP - Pittsburgh, PA | Get Active. Be Connected. Create Change.](#)
- [Home | Cool Pittsburgh | University of Pittsburgh](#)
- [City Cast Pittsburgh](#)
- [About QBurgh - LGBTQ Pittsburgh News & Community](#)
- [Stonewall Sports Pittsburgh - Community. Sports. Fun. \(stonewallsportspgh.org\)](#)

Many of our trainees have enjoyed their experience in Pittsburgh and have offered the following testimonials:



*“I was surprised with how much I fell in love with PGH during my internship year...I loved how different neighborhoods had their own unique identity, I loved the easy access to large parks within the city, and loved how beautiful PGH is with all its hills, bridges, and public art. What a gem of a city!”*

*“PGH has a ‘small city’ feel and it’s easy to find your niche here. At the same time, it’s a vibrant place to live, with lots going on. There is something for everyone—whether you love hiking and spending time outside or watching sports, or going to museums.”*

*“The great dining and food scene, and the very reasonable cost of living compared to other regions.”*

*“The city had a lot more diversity and cultural activities than I expected. Lots of great places to eat and things to do. I like the ethnic diversity of my neighborhoods. Easy access to natural areas inside and outside the city.”*

*“I found lots of social groups/clubs outside of work and made many friends that I still stay in touch with after leaving the area.”*

## **Application & Selection Procedures**

Prior to the start of the fellowship, a candidate must have completed the following requirements:

1. Completion of all doctoral degree requirements from an American Psychological Association (APA) or Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) accredited graduate program in Clinical, Counseling, or Combined psychology or Psychological Clinical Science Accreditation System (PCSAS) accredited program in Clinical Science. Persons with a doctorate in another area of psychology who meet the APA or CPA criteria for respecialization training in Clinical, Counseling, or Combined Psychology are also eligible.
2. Completion of an internship program accredited by APA or CPA or have completed a VA-sponsored internship.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) adheres to all Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action policies. As a Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Health Professions Trainee (HPT), you will receive a Federal appointment, and the following requirements will apply prior to that appointment:

1. **U.S. citizenship.** VA is unable to consider applications from anyone who is not currently a U.S. citizen. Verification of citizenship is required following selection. All fellows must complete a Certification of Citizenship in the United States prior to beginning VA training.
2. **U.S. Social Security Number.** All VA appointees must have a U.S. social security number (SSN) prior to beginning the pre-employment, on-boarding process at the VA.
3. **Selective Service Registration.** Male applicants born after 12/31/1959 must have registered for the Selective Service by age 26 to be eligible for U.S. government employment, including selection as a paid or WOC VA trainee. For additional information about the Selective Service System, and to register or to check your registration status visit <https://www.sss.gov/>. Anyone who was required to register but did not register before the age of 26 will need to apply for a Status Information Letter (SIL) and request a waiver. Waiver requests are rare and will be reviewed on a case by case basis. Waiver determinates are made by the VA Office of Human Resources Management and can take six months for a verdict.
4. **Fingerprint Screening and Background Investigation.** All Health Profession Trainees (HPTs) will be fingerprinted and undergo screenings and background investigations. Additional details

about the required background checks can be found at the following website:

<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/10450.html>.

5. **Drug Testing.** Per Executive Order 12564 the VA strives to be a Drug-Free Workplace. Health Professional Trainees (HPTs) are exempt from drug-testing prior to appointment, however interns are subject to random drug testing throughout the entire VA appointment period. You are required to sign an acknowledgement form stating you are aware of this practice prior to receiving your formal offer of employment. Please note that VA will initiate termination of VA appointment and/or dismissal from VA against any trainee who is found to use illegal drugs on the basis of a verified positive drug test (even if a drug is legal in the state where training) or refuses to be drug tested. Health Profession Trainees will be given the opportunity to justify a positive test result by submitting supplemental medical documentation to a Medical Review Officer when a confirmed positive test could have resulted from legally prescribed medication.
6. **TQCVL.** To streamline on-boarding of HPTs, VHA OAA requires completion of a Trainee Qualifications and Credentials Verification Letter (TQCVL). Following selection and prior to the start of training, the Director of Clinical Training will request the following documents from you to complete the TQCVL. Your VA appointment cannot happen until the TQCVL is submitted and signed by senior leadership from the VA facility. This document requires that you confirm the following health information and required vaccines for healthcare workers:
  - Evidence or self-certification that you are physically and mentally fit to perform the essential functions of the training program
  - Evidence of tuberculosis screening and testing per CDC health care personnel guidelines
  - Evidence or self-certification of up-to-date vaccinations for healthcare workers as recommended by the CDC and VA to include: Hepatitis B, MMR (Measles, Mumps, & Rubella), Varicella (Chickenpox), Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis), Annual Flu vaccine, and COVID-19 vaccination.
7. **Additional Forms.** Additional pre-employment forms include the Application for Health Professions Trainees (VA 10-2850D) and the Declaration for Federal Employment (OF 306). Falsifying any answer on these required Federal documents will result in the inability to appoint or immediate dismissal from the training program.
8. **Proof of Identity per VA.** VA on-boarding requires presentation of two source documents (IDs). Documents must be unexpired and names on both documents must match. Examples of source documents include US Passport or US Passport Card, driver's license or state issued ID card, US military card, US Social Security card, or an original or certified copy of a birth certificate.

Please note: Health Professions Trainees (HPTs) are appointed as temporary employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs. As such, HPTs are subject to laws, policies, and guidelines posted for VA staff members. There are infrequent times in which this guidance can change during a training year which may create new requirements or responsibilities for HPTs. If employment requirements change during the course of a training year, HPTs will be notified of the change and impact as soon as possible and options provided. The VA Training Director for your profession will provide you with the information you need to understand the requirement and reasons for the requirement in timely manner.

Applicants who have completed VA internships and who have an interest in a VA career are strongly encouraged to apply. Appropriate candidates will have entry-level practice skills. Applicants with both clinical and research experience in the area of focus are highly desirable. We value applicants with the ability to engage in scholarly inquiry and critical analysis of the scholarly literature. Given our focus on providing evidence based treatment to our veterans, we value applicants who have training in evidence based treatment approaches. Further, given the diversity of the veterans receiving treatment through the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, we encourage applicants from graduate and internship programs with a multicultural focus and experience with ethnic, cultural, and social minority groups. Our fellowship program values cultural and individual diversity and strongly encourages qualified applicants from all backgrounds to apply. We adhere to all EEO guidelines. The United States government is a non-discriminatory, affirmative action employer. Federal law prohibits discrimination based on age, sex, race, creed, color, religion, handicap or national origin.

***Applicants may apply to more than one program or focus area. The application process formally begins when an applicant submits the following materials:***

1. Cover letter indicating to which to which focus area(s) the applicant is applying (i.e., interprofessional care, PTSD, SUD), status on internship with expected completion date, and status of dissertation/doctoral project with anticipated completion date.
2. Official transcripts of all graduate work in psychology.
3. Current curriculum vitae.
4. Three letters of recommendation with at least one from a primary clinical supervisor who can describe clinical work and skills in the emphasis area of interest.
5. Letter from the applicant's dissertation chairperson verifying the applicant's current status on his/her dissertation research. If an applicant's dissertation is not completed at the time of application, this letter should also include the chairperson's estimate of when the applicant's dissertation will be completed.
6. Letter from the applicant's internship director of clinical training verifying the applicant's internship status and expected completion date.
7. A personal statement describing: history of applicant's interest in Clinical psychology focus area, self-assessment of training needs with goals for fellowship, and statement of career goals (one-page limit).

All applications must be submitted via the APPA CAS [APPIC Psychology Postdoctoral Application] online centralized application system. No paper applications will be accepted or reviewed. The APPA CAS can be accessed via the following link: <https://appicpostdoc.liaisoncas.com>

The deadline for all completed application materials is December 20, 2023. Only applications completed by this deadline will be considered.

Applications will be reviewed by three independent reviewers of the Clinical Training Committee and rated on a 10-point scale. Applicants are then ranked by total score (0-30 total) and selected applicants will be invited for interviews. Invited applicants are required to participate in 2 individual virtual interviews with staff supervisors. We are only offering virtual interviews; no on-site interviews will be offered or permitted. We are also offering 2 optional virtual open houses, during which candidates can

obtain additional information about the program from the Director of Clinical Training, attend a panel discussion with training faculty, and attend a panel discussion with current and former fellows. Dates for these optional virtual open houses are TBD. Points obtained during the interview process are added to the application score and offers are rendered per a rank order list created by total point score. Our program will abide by the APPIC Postdoctoral Common Hold Date selection guidelines. As such, we hope to begin offering positions on approximately 2/1/2024 and candidates may hold offers until the Common Hold Date of 2/26/2024. The program will follow the Common Hold Date process on 2/26/2024 for any unfilled positions.

Questions regarding the application process can be directed to Dr. Bernadette Pasquale at [Bernadette.Pasquale@va.gov](mailto:Bernadette.Pasquale@va.gov).

## Psychologist Training Supervisors

**Rebecca Reese Akcakaya, Ph.D.**, is the Behavioral Medicine Team Lead and Psychosocial Oncology Coordinator at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. She is also the Co-chair of the Psychology Diversity Subcommittee and is an active member of the Interdisciplinary Transgender Treatment Team (ITTT). She provides clinical care at University Drive division clinics. Dr. Akcakaya earned her doctorate in clinical health psychology from Washington University in St. Louis in 2012. She completed her pre-doctoral internship at the Boston Consortium with primary placements in Behavioral Medicine and the National Center for PTSD at VA Boston Healthcare System. She completed a Behavioral Medicine fellowship at VA Boston, where she also served as the expert psychologist and trainer on the VA nationwide provider training program for transgender veteran care, called Transgender SCAN-Echo. Dr. Akcakaya's interests include Psychosocial Oncology, Transplant Psychology, pre-surgical and pre-treatment psychosocial assessment, health behavior change, psychosocial adjustment to chronic illness, Women's Health, and transgender care. Dr. Akcakaya is completing VA certification in Interpersonal Therapy for Reproductive Mental Health (IPT-RMH).

**Sarah Butterworth, Ph.D.** is the Trauma Recovery Clinic (TRC) Team Lead. She earned her doctorate in clinical psychology at the University of Southern Mississippi in 2021 after completing her internship at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS). Dr. Butterworth is a VA-recognized provider of Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) and is completing VA certification in Cognitive Behavioral Conjoint Therapy – PTSD (CBCT-PTSD). Her clinical interests include evidence-based treatments for PTSD, the intersection of multicultural identity factors and experiences of trauma, treatment of military sexual trauma, and firearm means safety counseling. In her free time, Dr. Butterworth enjoys reading, baking, video games, board games, yoga, and walks with her dog. She enjoys a subscription to Book of the Month and her all-time favorite board game is Seven Wonders.

**Maria El-Tahch, PsyD.** is a behavioral medicine psychologist with an emphasis on chronic pain and addiction. She provides clinical care at the University Drive location. Dr. El-Tahch earned her doctorate degree in clinical psychology in 2017 from Nova Southeastern University. She completed her internship at the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System in 2017, and a fellowship in clinical health psychology with the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center in 2018. Her clinical interests include health behavior change, substance use, chronic pain, Women's Health, Motivational Interviewing, and

social determinants of health. Dr. El-Tahch has completed VA training and has provider status in Motivational Interviewing (MI), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Depression (ACT-D), and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Chronic Pain (CBT-CP) . She is scheduled to complete provider certification in Empowered Relief. Her personal interests include yoga, craft coffee, cooking, horror movies, spending time with her husband and dog, and exploring the Pittsburgh restaurant scene.

**Leigh Gemmell, Ph.D.** is the Program Manager for the Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders. She earned her doctorate in clinical psychology at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County in 2007 after completing her internship at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS). She participated in a fellowship program in health services research at VAPHS's Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion (CHERP), and a fellowship program in psycho-oncology and transplant medicine at the Starzl Transplantation Institute at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Dr. Gemmell's clinical and research interests include substance use disorders, residential treatment, CBT, ACT, motivational interviewing, chronic illness, and self-management in addiction. Dr. Gemmell is a supervisor for the fellow in the Substance Use Disorder emphasis. Dr. Gemmell has completed VA training and has provider status in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Substance Use Disorders (CBT-SUD), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression (CBT-D) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Depression (ACT-D). She also serves as a VA consultant for CBT-SUD.

**Ashley Gill, Ph.D.** is a clinical psychologist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System in the Trauma Recovery Clinic (TRC). She additionally serves as Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Coordinator for VAPHS. She earned her doctorate in clinical psychology from Duquesne University in 2019 after completing her internship at George E. Wahlen VA Medical Center in Salt Lake City, UT. Dr. Gill is a VA-recognized provider of Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Interpersonal Therapy for Depression (IPT-D), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I), and Motivational Interviewing. Her interests include trauma-focused and trauma-informed interventions, socio-cultural considerations in the delivery of EBP's, complex PTSD, and the relationship between sleep and trauma. Dr. Gill also serves as a clinical consultant to local Vet centers. In her free time, she enjoys cake decorating, hiking, drinking strong coffee, and spending time with her partner and their dogs.

**Susan Jefferson, Psy.D.** is a staff psychologist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders (CTAD). She additionally serves as the Evidence-Based Psychotherapy Co-Coordinator for VAPHS. She earned her doctorate in clinical psychology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2013 after completing her internship at VAPHS. After internship, Dr. Jefferson moved directly into a staff role serving as the lead behavioral health provider at a VAPHS Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), Dr. Jefferson is a VA recognized provider in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Substance Use Disorders (CBT-SUD), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Chronic Pain (CBT-CP). Dr. Jefferson also has completed specialized training in Geropsychology through the VA Geriatric Scholars program. Her professional interests include Mindfulness, Self-Compassion, Training/Supervision, Evidence-Based Psychotherapy, Geropsychology. On a personal note, Dr. Jefferson loves to explore new horizons, including traveling the world and going on outdoor adventures with her family, friends, and adventurous cat. She is a second-career psychologist (previously worked in brand management, new products, online travel).



**Jessica Kieta, Psy.D.** is a behavioral medicine psychologist with an emphasis on pain and headache self-management. She is the co-director of the Interdisciplinary Pain Rehabilitation Program (IPRP) and a member of the Interdisciplinary Transgender Treatment Team (ITTT) and Opioid Stewardship Committee. She provides clinical care at the University Drive and H. J. Heinz locations. She earned her doctoral degree in clinical psychology from Wright State University in 2020. She completed her pre-doctoral internship in 2020 at the VA Central Ohio Healthcare System and her post-doctoral fellowship in 2021 at a comprehensive treatment center for individuals diagnosed with opioid use disorders. She is scheduled to complete VA certification in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Chronic Pain (CBT-CP) and provider certification in Empowered Relief. Her clinical interests include chronic pain self-management, health behavior change, rehabilitation psychology, gender affirming psychology, MI, CBT, ACT, and DBT skills training. Her personal interests include watching live music and comedy, spending time with her family and dog, cooking, and hiking.

**Christina Muthard-White, Psy.D.** is a staff psychologist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders (CTAD), and also serves on VAPHS's Interdisciplinary Eating Disorder Treatment Team (IEDTT). Dr. Muthard-White earned her doctorate degree in clinical psychology in 2019 from Marywood University in Scranton, Pennsylvania. She completed her internship at the Central Texas VA Healthcare System in Austin, TX in 2019, and completed fellowship at VA Pittsburgh's Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders. Her primary clinical interests include cognitive behavior therapies (for treating substance use disorders, eating disorders, depression, and trauma), and motivational interviewing. Dr. Muthard-White is a VA recognized provider of Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Substance Use Disorders (CBT-SUD), Cognitive Processing Therapy for PTSD, and Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Depression, and also received VA national training in the multidisciplinary treatment of eating disorders. She supervises interns and fellows on the CTAD rotation, and is also an active member of the Diversity Subcommittee. In her free time, Dr. Muthard-White enjoys spending time outdoors, and with her cats (Moby and Jax).

**Bernadette M. Pasquale, Ph.D., ABPP** is a staff geropsychologist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System and is the Director of Clinical Training for the internship and fellowship programs. Dr. Pasquale earned her doctorate in clinical psychology from Ohio University in 1995. She completed her internship at the Miami VA Medical Center in 1994 and completed a geropsychology fellowship at the Cleveland VA Medical Center in 1996. She is board certified in Geropsychology. Dr. Pasquale has clinical responsibilities in the Outpatient BHIP and GEM/GDSC clinics. Dr. Pasquale has also completed VA training and consultation in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression and has provider status. Her personal interests include biking the great trails in this area, powerwalking, baking, and most recently—playing pickleball.

**Michael L. Rosen, Ph.D.** is a psychologist at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System in the Trauma Recovery Clinic (TRC). He earned his doctorate in counseling psychology at the University of Kansas after completion of his internship at the Pittsburgh VA Healthcare System. He additionally completed his postdoctoral residency at the Pittsburgh VA Healthcare System, PTSD track. Dr. Rosen supervises psychology fellows and interns on the TRC rotation. He is a VA recognized provider of Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) and Cognitive Behavioral Conjoint Therapy – PTSD (CBCT-PTSD). Dr. Rosen is also a consultant with the National Center for PTSD, helping VA Pittsburgh implement their rollout for recently developed mental health apps for mobile phones. He is also a local consultant with the

Wheeling Vet Center. His clinical and research interests have focused on the use of evidence-based psychotherapies for PTSD, therapist variables such as theoretical orientation and allegiance, and shared decision-making in treatment. In his spare time, Dr Rosen enjoys running/exercising, losing at fantasy football and baseball, and annoying his neighbors with his electric guitar. He also has a Persian cat, Mads Mikkelsen, who has been known to be a fan favorite among past trainee cohorts.

**Jody Tomko, Ph.D., DBSM**, is a staff psychologist in Behavioral Medicine with an emphasis on Behavioral Sleep Medicine. She provides clinical care at the University Drive and HJ Heinz campuses. She earned her doctorate in counseling psychology from Western Michigan University in 2008. Dr. Tomko completed her clinical internship at VA Western New York Healthcare System in 2008. Dr. Tomko's primary clinical and research interests are in insomnia, health behavior change, geropsychology, training /supervision, and cultural diversity. Dr. Tomko has completed VA training and consultation in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Nightmares, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression, Motivational Interviewing, and Problem Solving Training and has provider status. Dr. Tomko's personal interests include volleyball, puzzles, and brunch. She enjoys spending time with her school-age children, family and friends, watching sketch comedy, and listening to live music.

**Patrick Whitmoyer, Ph.D.**, is a Behavioral Medicine Psychologist at VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. He is also an active member of the Psychology Diversity Subcommittee. He provides clinical care at the University Drive division and HJ Heinz clinics. Dr. Whitmoyer earned his doctorate in clinical health psychology from The Ohio State University in 2020. He completed his pre-doctoral internship in the Health Psychology track of the VA Maryland Health Care System/University of Maryland-School of Medicine Consortium with primary placements in Hospice and Palliative Care, Health Psychology, and Geropsychology at the VA Maryland Health Care System. He then completed the Professional Geropsychology fellowship at VA Pittsburgh. Dr. Whitmoyer is one of the supervisors for the Interprofessional Care focus. Dr. Whitmoyer's clinical interests include pre-surgical and pre-treatment psychosocial assessment, health behavior change, psychosocial adjustment to chronic illness, neurocognitive disorders, functional neurological symptom disorders, geropsychology, and capacity assessment. Personal interests include hiking, camping, playing basketball, reading, and spending time with friends/family. Dr. Whitmoyer is an avid fan of sci-fi and Duke basketball.