

**Psychology Externship Program  
VA Medical Center  
Northport, New York**



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## **Introduction**

The Northport VAMC is located in Suffolk County, approximately 40 miles from midtown Manhattan. Opened in 1928 as a psychiatric hospital, the VA Medical Center at Northport was converted to a full service Medical Center in 1971. The Northport VAMC provides inpatient medical, surgical, and psychiatric treatment. There is also nursing home care and residential treatment for substance abuse and PTSD. Over 600,000 medical and psychiatric outpatient visits were made last year to the Medical Center and to its Community Based Outpatient Clinics throughout Long Island. The Northport VAMC is accredited by The Joint Commission and is a clinical campus of the School of Medicine at Stony Brook University. Several programs are accredited by The Commission on Accreditation for Rehabilitation Facilities.

Active duty service members and veterans who received an Honorable Discharge from the military are eligible to utilize the VA for their mental and physical health needs. There are approximately 79,0000 veterans living in Suffolk County alone, and the Northport VAMC attracts many more veterans from throughout the New York metropolitan area. Over 15,000 veterans sought care at Northport VAMC within the last year. The veteran population reflects the demographics of the area and represents military service periods from WW II to today's Global War on Terror. The population is therefore diverse in age, ethnic background, disability status, clinical presentation, and range of functioning. Since veterans often present with medical, psychiatric, and psychosocial needs the VA takes an integrated approach to care.

The Psychology Service at the Northport VA Medical Center is an autonomous service headed by a Chief, and includes 25 psychologists. The range of professional activities conducted is exceptionally wide. Generally, psychologists are members of multidisciplinary treatment teams and, in some cases, are directors of treatment programs. Staff members conduct psychological and neuropsychological assessments and provide psychotherapy and behavioral treatments. Psychologists also provide consultation to other health care providers.

## **Overview of the Externship**

The Northport VA psychology service is committed to the professional development of its externs. Our mission is to provide clinical training that focuses on the advancement of skill in the delivery of psychotherapy and assessment, greater comfort in a multidisciplinary medical setting, and an increased confidence in the role of a culturally sensitive and ethically responsible psychologist. The externship program emphasizes service delivery in a nurturing atmosphere. Training is developmental in nature such that we consider each extern's current level of mastery and ability to work autonomously in specific competency areas. For example, an extern who initially co-leads a group may later facilitate independently. Supervision likewise begins with direct observation and may culminate in a more consultative role.

Externs model the functions of a psychologist in the setting in which he/she is assigned. Depending on the track this may include participation in interdisciplinary meetings, the delivery of therapy, conducting intakes, the provision of evidence based treatments, assessment, crisis intervention, safety planning, consultation with other providers, and/ or documentation in the computerized medical record. Opportunities for therapeutic intervention may include neuropsychological assessment, short-term and long-term individual therapy, couples therapy, and process-oriented and psychoeducational group treatment. Attention to diversity and individual differences is integral to all training experiences.

Our psychologists are trained in a broad range of orientations including psychodynamic therapy, CBT, and third-wave models. The integration of science and practice is emphasized in all supervisory approaches. Training in evidence based protocols and skills (e.g., CBT-Insomnia, Cognitive Processing Therapy, CBT-Depression, Motivational Interviewing, CBT-Pain, Psychodynamic Psychotherapy) are offered at the beginning of the year. Depending on the track, participation in one of these approaches may be mandatory in order to perform effectively in a particular setting. An extern may choose to participate in as many of these trainings as he/she wishes for didactic and/or clinical purposes. Externs may also elect to participate in the seminars held on Tues and Thus afternoons. Seminars cover material

such as Multicultural Case Conference, Psychopharmacology, Forensics, Violence Assessment, Military Culture, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Acceptance and Mindfulness Modalities.

We offer a range of tracks to choose from. A description of these opportunities is provided on the pages that follow. Externs have the option of supplementary clinical experiences. This may include an individual psychotherapy case from the outpatient mental health clinic (which is available to veterans of all service eras) or a psychotherapy group in a setting outside of your track.

We are happy to accept applications to our APA accredited internship program from our current and past externs. Information on our internship is available at <http://www.northport.va.gov/docs/psychologyinternship.pdf>.

## **Eligibility and Requirements**

To be eligible for externship placement, an extern must be in good standing at an APA accredited doctoral program in psychology. Applicants must be US citizens. The training year begins in late August or early September and ends the last week of May. A commitment of 16 hours per week is required. Typically the day begins at 8am and ends at 4:30pm. Specific days are individualized based on the extern's availability and the program's needs. Externs have off all Federal holidays and may take leave (not to exceed 8 days) with appropriate notice. Externs are expected to adhere to VA policy. An orientation to the VA and psychology service will occur the first week of externship. Externships are not funded positions.

## **Tracks**

**The following tracks are available. Please choose one or two tracks for consideration. As noted above there are opportunities for supplementary clinical and didactic experiences.**

### **1) Acute Units and Psychological Assessment**

#### **Acute Units**

The Northport VA maintains two inpatient units which support the full range of acute psychological presenting problems. The program utilizes a combination of medication, psychotherapy, and a variety of recreational and psycho-educational activities to create a therapeutic program focused on stabilization and treatment planning for veterans in acute distress. The psychology program provides group psychotherapy, individual psychotherapy, and safety planning. Psychological therapies utilized are based on evidence-based therapies from a wide range of psychological orientations. The focus of psychotherapy on the units includes: helping to develop veteran's insight into own mental health diagnoses and/or patterns of functioning, enhancing motivation for mental health treatment, psycho-education about mental illness for both veterans and their families, safety planning for suicide, homicide, and substance use risks, and treatment planning for full range of psychological concerns. There is a substantial focus on both units on substance use disorder recovery. Each unit has a bed capacity for up to 21 residents and provides treatment to male and female veterans who are culturally and ethnically diverse with a wide range of ages. Veterans of all wars are eligible for treatment but the population is generally comprised of veterans who served during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and the Vietnam War.

Possible Clinical Activities: Externs have the opportunity to participate in staff meetings, co-lead both psychotherapy and psycho-education groups with supervising psychologist, provide brief individual psychotherapy, and learn to develop high quality assessments of and safety plans for suicide/homicide/domestic violence. Current psychotherapy groups focus on the treatment of substance abuse, posttraumatic symptoms, and mood disturbance. A large part of this rotational experience includes

learning how to be a contributing part of a larger interdisciplinary team comprised of psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, nursing aids, peer support specialists, and recreational therapists.

Days: Tuesdays or Fridays

Supervisor: Louis E. Mora, PhD

### **Psychological Assessment**

Externs learn to develop skills in providing consultation to other health care providers around issues of differential diagnosis. and in designing and administering an assessment battery that addresses a specific referral question. The majority of the referrals are for neuropsychological assessment, but externs may also conduct psychodiagnostic assessments. They will develop skills in designing and administering assessment measures, and will learn to use findings to clarify an understanding of veterans' mental functioning to aid in diagnostic determination, patient education and treatment planning. Externs are supervised in all aspects of the evaluation, including the clinical interview, administration and interpretation of appropriate test batteries, report writing and in providing meaningful feedback. Externs need to have some basic assessment experience to participate in this rotation, including administration of intelligence measures (e.g., WAIS-IV) and as well as cognitive and personality tests. Externs should also have basic report writing experience.

Possible clinical activities: Administration, interpretation, and report writing. Possible presenting problems include differential diagnosis, complaints of memory issues, and assessment of Traumatic Brain Injury.

Days: flexible, Mon or Fri work best

Supervisors: William Cheney, PhD; Mark Sandberg, PhD

## **2) Community Living Center**

The Community Living Center (CLC) rotation will provide externs with the opportunity to work with older adults, mostly male, but some female veterans, residing at the Northport VA Medical Center. This population includes veterans of World War II, Korea, and increasingly, the Vietnam era. Residents present with varied psychiatric diagnoses, including PTSD, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, personality disorders, substance use histories, and a wide variety of neurocognitive disorders, such as Alzheimer's, vascular, Lewy Body, Frontotemporal, Creutzfeld-Jacobs, and Korsakoff's syndrome. These residents often face significant comorbid medical problems, such as cardiac and respiratory conditions, diabetes, neurological disorders, and cancer.

Externs will serve as integral members of the interdisciplinary team working with physicians, nurse practitioners, nursing staff, social workers, chaplains, occupational and physical therapists, nutritionists, and recreation therapists. Externs will attend weekly behavior rounds, during which time the treatment team reviews and discusses residents' challenging behaviors or mental health concerns. In addition to individual and group therapy, externs will have the opportunity to engage in behavioral management interventions, including creation and implementation of a Behavioral Treatment Plan, which involves an interdisciplinary approach to creating behavioral plans tailored to individual resident needs and goals.

Externs may also participate in STAR-VA (Staff Training in Assisted Living Residences) educational trainings offered to the CLC staff. STAR-VA is a nationwide, research based approach to addressing challenging behaviors of residents with dementia diagnoses. It involves teaching CLC staff effective, non-pharmacological methods to manage behaviors that interfere with the residents' quality of life or the overall smooth functioning of the CLCs. The goal of STAR-VA interventions is to reduce the use of pharmacological interventions in treating challenging behaviors and improve the quality of life for residents and staff.

Two of the four CLCs are extended care facilities for veterans who require skilled nursing care for a wide variety of medical and psychiatric diagnoses. The third CLC is a locked neuropsychiatric unit for veterans with serious and persistent mental illness who require a more structured and restrictive setting. This unit also serves veterans with advanced dementia or those who present an elopement risk. The fourth CLC serves two populations: palliative care for veterans at end-of-life is provided on one wing while respite and short-stay rehabilitative services for veterans living in the community is provided on the other wing. Externs will specify which population and unit they would prefer to focus their CLC experience.

Days: flexible; would vary depending on specific CLC

Supervisors: Maureen Welsh, PhD; Amy Scott, PsyD; Lauren Fitzgerald, PsyD

### **3) Dual Diagnosis Recovery Center**

The Dual Diagnosis Recovery Center is an evidence-based interdisciplinary outpatient treatment program that aims to improve the quality of life for veterans with co-occurring severe and persistent mental illness and active substance use disorders by integrating substance abuse services with traditional mental health care. The core philosophy of the DDRC rests on the principles of bio-psychosocial rehabilitation, combining pharmacological, psychological, educational, and social interventions to assist the veteran to stabilize his/her illness and when possible, to establish a meaningful role in the community. Interventions will be culturally sensitive, dignifying, and respectful of individuality. DDRC therapists endeavor to establish therapeutic relationships with veterans that are free of power struggles, collaborative, draw upon existing strengths, and are focused on instilling hope.

Possible clinical activities: Externs participating in the DDRC rotation will be involved, under appropriate supervision, in the provision of group psychotherapy, group psychoeducation as well as individual psychotherapy cases when more intensive work is needed. Primary population treated will be OIF/OEF combat trauma with active substance use, some of whom will be legally mandated to treatment. Students will also have the opportunity to work with a wider cross section of clients in DDRC in the psychoeducation classes. Psychoeducation may include opportunities such as Relapse Prevention, Anger Management, Pain Management, STAIR, Seeking Safety, and Dialectical Behavior Therapy. Crisis intervention skills will also be developed as frequent risk assessments will be conducted on clients to determine if a higher level of care is warranted given veteran's fast changing presentations that can accompany active substance use. Possible opportunities depending on the needs of the client may involve accompanying veteran to emergency room if inpatient admission is appropriate, consulting and collaborating with inpatient and outpatient IDT teams to facilitate treatment, and providing informal support to family members regarding veteran's current struggles. Telephone assessment and crisis support when needed will also be done. In these calls the focus will be placed on assessment of safety, and when appropriate contacting police if a wellness check is deemed necessary. Externs will also be involved in chart review, screening, intakes, and treatment planning as appropriate.

Days: Flexible Schedule: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday are primary group days (Minimum of 2 days required)

Supervisor: Tracy French, PsyD

### **4) Iraq and Afghanistan Wars Readjustment Program**

This program is geared to addressing the mental health needs of those who have served in the Iraq and Afghanistan war zones. It emphasizes making mental health services accessible to active duty military personnel and to veterans. In this year-long training experience, externs do initial interviews and provide

individual psychoanalytic psychotherapy consistent with the evidence-based practice of psychotherapy. The therapy model is based on principles of psychotherapy that can guide the practice of therapy for the range of DSM diagnoses. PTSD is a frequent presenting problem in this clinic. However, since about 80 % of PTSD cases involve co-morbidity with such other diagnoses as substance use disorders, depression, generalized anxiety disorder, and personality disorders, our focus is on preparing interns to address such co-morbidity in their practice of psychotherapy for trauma-related conditions. Supervision is in a group format and includes, in addition to interns, externs and post-doctoral fellows. The open-dialogue model of supervision is intended to encourage open, mutual, detailed discussion of participants' psychotherapy cases with a focus on their use of core elements of effective psychotherapy.

This model allows participants the opportunity to benefit from, in addition to discussion of their own work, the discussion of the work of their fellow participants. It also allows for participants' furthering their supervisory skills, as they collaboratively facilitate the process of group members' open dialogue about their work. The groups' co-supervisors will provide readings on theory, research, and practice-related to issues addressed in the course of supervision.

Case Load: 4 individuals

Group Supervision: 1.5 hours

Individual Supervision: 1 hour

Days: Fridays are mandatory (for supervision); second day flexible

Supervisors: Stephen Long, PhD; Melody Millando-Wirtenson, PhD

## **5) Primary Care – Mental Health Integration (PC-MHI)**

PC-MHI staff and trainees work collaboratively with the medical teams in the Primary Care (PC) clinics. The medical teams in PC provide comprehensive outpatient medical services to over 16,000 veterans annually. The teams work in a medical home model, known in the VA as Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACTs). PC-MHI is considered an extension of the PACT. Social workers, nutritionists, and pharmacists also serve as extended team members. PC-MHI externs work in the PC clinics alongside the PACTs and other extended team members. Veterans present with a range of psychopathology such that interventions may be focused on treatment of a clinical condition or the behavioral intervention of a medical problem. Same day access to care and an active environment allows ample opportunity for consultation.

Possible clinical activities: Externs provide short-term focused individual psychotherapy utilizing evidence based approaches such as motivational interviewing and cognitive-behavioral approaches (e.g., CBT-I, CBT-pain). Training in EBTs will be provided at the start of the year. Externs may also participate in the MOVE! weight management group. Cognitive-behavioral, group dynamics, group support, and other approaches are used to help veterans lose weight. The Smoking Cessation Program is another opportunity open to externs. The clinic provides comprehensive assessment, treatment and follow-up support in a group and individual format. Externs may co-facilitate the Mindfulness for Stress Reduction group, teaching veterans to relate better to stressors using skills of mindfulness.

Days: Flexible.

Thursdays allow for participation in the PC-MHI interdisciplinary team (IDT) meeting, which includes all PC-MHI staff (psychologists, psychiatrist, care managers), psychology and psychiatry fellows, psychology interns, PC-MHI extern, and the Health Promotion Disease Prevention (HPDP) Coordinator. The IDT meeting is used for case presentations, clinical discussions, and the disposition of cases for treatment. Fridays allow for participation in the smoking cessation program.

Supervisors: Nyasanu Barbee, PhD; Deirdra Frum, PsyD; Joanne Taylor, PhD; Mathew Williams, PhD

## **6) Psychosocial Rehabilitation Recovery Center**

The Psychosocial Rehabilitation Recovery Center (PRRC) is a recovery-based program for veterans diagnosed with severe mental illness. The veterans we serve present with a broad range of functioning and have diagnoses such as PTSD, Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Social Anxiety, and Schizophrenia. The program provides a structured, supportive environment within which veterans can develop the skills and confidence necessary to live satisfying lives and function successfully in the community. It empowers veterans to take control of their lives by becoming actively involved in their recovery, in the program itself, and in the outside community. The multidisciplinary treatment team includes staff from Psychology, Social Work, Recreation, Nursing, and Vocational Rehabilitation. Peer support technicians are also on the staff and offer a unique perspective for our veterans.

Services offered include process oriented psychotherapy groups, psycho-educational groups (e.g., CBT for Depression, Smoking Cessation, Weight Management, Mindful Meditation, CBT-I), skills training groups (e.g., Life Skills, Anger Management, Relationship Skills, Coping with PTSD), socialization, recreation (e.g., Golf, Bingo, Yoga, Tai Chi) and self-help activities. Veterans are scheduled to attend the program from one to five days per week depending on their needs as assessed by the treatment team.

Possible clinical activities: Externs may attend community and interdisciplinary staff meetings, lead and co-lead groups, and participate fully in treatment planning and implementation. Externs may contribute to program development (e.g., initiating a new group) and have the opportunity to conduct screenings and intakes where available.

Days: flexible

Supervisors: Margaret Rayne, PsyD; Amy Tal, PhD

## **7) Substance Abuse Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program**

The SARRTP is a residential treatment program for substance abusers who require a structured and therapeutic environment. In addition to substance dependence the residents typically receive treatment for co-occurring medical and/or psychiatric issues. The 30 residents participate in substance abuse treatment, vocational rehabilitation and self-help groups. Externs function as members of a multidisciplinary team, which includes staff from Psychology, Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Work, Nursing, and paraprofessionals. Externs who participate in the SARRTP rotation gain experience in complex case conceptualization. Additionally, externs enhance skills through conducting a bio-psychosocial assessment and an individualized treatment plan for each assigned resident on the extern's caseload.

Possible clinical activities: Externs participate in community, staff meetings, and group psychotherapy. They may have the opportunity to participate in additional psychoeducational groups including Relapse Prevention, Health and Wellness, Positive Relationship Skills and Anger Management which occur on Mondays or Tuesdays. Externs also serve as primary therapists by providing individual psychotherapy to two SARRTP residents at any given time.

Days: Of the two days for this rotation, Thursday is mandatory. For the second day, Monday or Tuesday are preferred.

Supervisors: Michelle Castellano, PhD; Janet Eschen, PhD; Erin Kode, PsyD; Marc Shulman, PhD

## **Application Process**

Please email or mail:

- a) a cover letter specifying **up to two tracks** of interest (if you express interest in two tracks you may be invited to interview for one or both)
- b) a CV
- c) two letters of recommendation

Mail:

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\*The Northport VAMC externship program adheres to the application guidelines outlined by PSYDNYS.