

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Academic Affiliations  
Washington, DC

**PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT**  
**Post-doctoral Nurse Fellowship Program**

**1. PURPOSE AND GOAL**

This document announces policy and procedure for the Post-doctoral Nursing Research Fellowship application. Fellowship applications are initiated twice yearly by the fellow candidates in partnership with VA and academic research mentor(s), and VA leadership. Specific requirements of fellows, mentors and facility leadership for the development of a comprehensive application are delineated in the following paragraphs.

The Post-doctoral Nurse Fellowship Program is designed to provide nurses who have a research- focused doctorate<sup>1</sup> the opportunity to broaden their scientific or research background, or to extend their potential for clinical research in nursing. The major goal of the Post-doctoral Nurse Fellowship Program is to develop a cadre of nurse researchers who will be able to: (a) conduct nursing research; (b) promote integration of significant research findings into the care of patients; (c) secure funds for studies through grants; and (d) foster communication of research findings through presentations and publications.

Clinical activities are strengthened when research is conducted in conjunction with patient care. VA has a need for nurses who can integrate research findings with patient care. Additionally, the program focuses on preparing nurse researchers who will contribute to the body of nursing knowledge by expanding, synthesizing, or testing theories relevant to nursing phenomena, or testing interventions derived from these theories using diverse research methods and knowledge from other disciplines. Additional training of doctorally prepared nurses is essential to augment their knowledge and competencies in research, or in assuming research leadership or education roles.

**2. POLICY**

a. The fellowship is intended to support research training for those who lack research experience, not to serve as support for experienced researchers to conduct investigations.

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<sup>1</sup> *American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2006). The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice. Retrieved July 5, 2013 from <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/DNP/pdf/Essentials.pdf>.*

b. The fellowship program will include: (1) supplementary intensive training in research methodology and techniques at a university or VA facility and (2) research experiences at a VA facility under the direct supervision of an established investigator. The research training will be guided by a preceptor who holds a doctoral degree, has a proven record of research pertinent to nursing, and is qualified to serve as a mentor for fellows.

c. Proposed research must be relevant to VA care of Veterans.<sup>2</sup>

d. Fellowship positions will be reviewed and funded by OAA twice a year. Applications are due to OAA by the close of business (COB) on the first Monday of October or the first Monday of May.

(1) Applications will be reviewed by the last Friday of October, or May.

(2) Notice of approved applications will be distributed by the second Monday in November or June.

e. Fellows will be appointed full-time (40-hours per week) for up to two years or part-time (minimum of 20 hours per week) for up to 3 years. Part-time fellows will receive a pro-rated stipend at the same hourly rate as full-time fellows. Continuation in the program for a second or third year is contingent upon a satisfactory performance evaluation during the prior year.

f. Appointments will be made under 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1)(D) as reflected in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Chapter 3, Section 6b for a period not to exceed two (2) years full-time (40 hours per week) or three (3) years part-time (minimum of 20 hours per week). However, continuation of appointment for a second year or third year will depend upon a satisfactory evaluation of the nurse fellow's performance during the prior year. For PAID coding purposes,

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<sup>2</sup> To demonstrate the relevancy of the research to VA care of Veterans, it should involve the Veteran population in the sample. However, there are situations when non-Veteran populations would be appropriate:

(1) The study compares an intervention with a Veteran population and a non-Veteran population. Studies that compare VA to non-VA care are acceptable.

(2) The local sample is not large enough to provide adequate statistical power. Thus, for example, a sample from a VA nursing home may need to be supplemented with a community-based nursing home to provide adequate statistical power. An additional justification for a non-Veteran sample might be to have an adequate number of women or minority patients in the sample

(3) The study intervention or measurement tool is not presently available at a VA site, yet is relevant to a Veteran population. Generally, the goal in these studies is to show that the intervention or measurement tool is efficacious in a non-VA site before incurring the high cost of developing and implementing a pilot at a VA site.

these trainees will be identified by the use of occupation series and title code 0610-84-K5, pay plan code M, grade 00, step N.

g. Post-doctoral Nurse Fellows are not eligible to be appointed under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA).

h. The annual stipend for the Post-doctoral Nurse Fellowship Program is locality based and may be found on the OAA Support website (<http://vaww.oaa.med.va.gov/>). Part-time fellows will receive a pro-rated stipend at the same hourly rate as full-time fellows. OAA will provide approved VA facilities with funding for stipends, for VA's share (7.65%) of Federal Insurance Contribution Act (FICA) deposits, and VA's share of health and life insurance premiums.

i. The Office of Research and Development will provide \$3,000 per year to support research related costs. Management of these funds is considered to be part of the educational experience. A report of expenditures must be incorporated into the annual progress report.

j. Fellows may be detailed to other educational institutions without loss of pay. However, under no circumstances may the total time spent in non-VA institutions exceed one-sixth of the total hours a fellow is in a pay and training status with VA. (Reference: VA Handbook 5007, Part II, Chapter 2, paragraph 2.m.(3).

k. Post-doctoral Nurse Fellows are eligible to participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program and the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance Program. The Office of Academic Affiliations will provide funds to the VA facilities to pay for VA's share of the premiums. The fellow will be required to pay for the employee's share of the premiums.

l. The fellows will receive annual and sick leave under the General Schedule leave system (5 U.S.C., chapter 63). Fellows are strongly encouraged to use accrued annual leave prior to the end of the fellowship so that a lump sum payment for the leave will not be required. The Office of Academic Affiliations generally does not pay for this lump sum payment, so the facility will be required to pay it from local funds.

m. Transportation to the VA facility site and housing arrangements are the sole responsibility of the selected fellows.

n. Fellows will be protected from personal liability while providing professional services at a VA health care facility under the Federal Employees Liability Reform and Tort Compensation Act, 28 U.S.C. 2679 (b)-(d) and will be provided compensation for job-related illnesses or injuries under 5 U.S.C., chapter 81.

o. There is no employment obligation required following completion of the fellowship program although fellows are encouraged to seek permanent employment within the VA

system. Fellowship program directors and preceptors are encouraged to assist the fellow in obtaining VA employment after the fellowship.

p. Fellows must identify their VA fellowship in all reports, publications, and presentations while a fellow and after the fellowship if the activity is related to the fellowship. Failure to do so may result in termination of the fellowship award or program by the Office of Academic Affiliations. Fellows must provide the Office of Academic Affiliations with an abstract for all publications and presentations based on research supported by the fellowship program.

### **3. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR THE VA FACILITY**

a. Resources and Environment: The VA facility must document research programs that will support research activities of the post-doctoral fellow.

b. Preceptor: A doctorally prepared preceptor must be available, either on the staff of the VA facility or on the faculty at the university, holding a paid or without compensation (WOC) appointment at the VA facility. The identified preceptor must have had experiences as a mentor and research experiences in nursing, biological, or behavioral sciences and other health related sciences.

c. Program Director: A VA nurse who is employed full-time must be available to serve as the program director. The nurse program director will be the liaison person between the fellow and appropriate VA facility and affiliated university personnel. If qualified, the nurse program director can also be proposed as the preceptor for the fellow.

d. Affiliated College or University: The VA facility must have established affiliations with college and university graduate programs in nursing or other related disciplines.

### **4. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY**

a. The applicant must be a citizen of the United States. No exceptions will be made.

b. The applicant must hold active, current registration as a graduate professional nurse in a State, Territory, or Commonwealth (e.g., Puerto Rico) of the United States or the District of Columbia. This registration does not have to be in the state, territory, or commonwealth where the fellowship will take place.

c. The applicant must have, or anticipate having, a research-focused doctorate by the beginning of the fellowship program, from a program accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). If the applicant does not have the degree at the time of application, a letter from the academic program must be included with the application that states the

expectation that all degree requirements will be met by the intended start date of the fellowship program. An applicant will not be allowed to start the fellowship until official documentation is received by the Office of Academic Affiliations stating that all degree requirements have been met.

d. The applicant must hold a master's degree in nursing, or a master's degree in a field related to nursing and a baccalaureate degree in nursing. Nursing degrees must be awarded from programs accredited by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

e. The applicant must be able to meet the applicable credentialing and licensing requirements of VA. (see VHA Handbook 1100.19, Credentialing and Privileging)

## 5. APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

a. The VA facility should e-mail the proposal to [Mary.Dougherty@va.gov](mailto:Mary.Dougherty@va.gov) so that it will be received in OAA by the first Monday of the designated month. If for any reason you cannot e-mail your proposal, you may fax your proposal to Dr. Mary Dougherty at 202-461-9498; however, an e-mail is preferable.

b. The application **must not exceed 36 single-spaced pages** including the transmittal letter, core narrative, and appendices. The curricula vitae of the applicant, program director, and preceptor do not count toward this 36 page limitation. The font must be at least 10 point and all margins must be at least one inch. The application must contain.

- (1) Transmittal letter from the facility Director stating
  - (a) that the facility is prepared to support the fellowship program
  - (b) the names, routing symbols, e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, and fax numbers of the preceptor and of the fellowship program director at the VA facility.
  - (c) whether the applicant is requesting a full-time or part-time fellowship. If requesting part-time, state the proposed number of hours per 2-week pay period.
  - (d) the requested start date of the fellowship program.
  
- (2) Core narrative, which **must not exceed 15 pages**, is to describe the facility characteristics, the academic institutions' characteristics and roles, the fellowship program training staff, the proposed fellowship program curriculum, and the proposed evaluation plan. The following information must be included:
  - (a) Applicant

- Name and description of background, including undergraduate and graduate education and past clinical, education, and research roles and responsibilities. Curriculum vita or résumé should be included in the appendix and does not count toward page limits.
- Short and long term goals
- Areas of interest as they relate to the proposed fellowship program.

(b) VA Facility Characteristics. A sponsoring VA facility must have an environment conducive to research in the areas of clinical care of patients, nursing care delivery, or basic science. Information should include, but is not limited to:

- Description of research programs in nursing, or areas relevant to nursing, offered by the VA facility and the record of training researchers.
- List of individuals in the VA facility that will be involved in the fellowship program by providing clinical, educational, and research opportunities for the fellow. List the individuals' names, status of VA employment (paid or WOC and number of hours per 80-hour), position titles, roles in the fellowship program, and percent of time being dedicated to the fellowship. Brief biographic sketches (abbreviated curricula vitae), not to exceed three pages per person, should be included in the appendix to provide educational background, competitive research grant awards within the last three to five years (by title, source, time period, and dollar amount), selected relevant peer-reviewed publications (not to exceed six), and previous experience in working with and supervising post-doctoral fellows.
- List of other resources (e.g., office space, computers, and statistician) available to the fellow. Animal research facilities should also be included, if pertinent.
- Program Director's name, position, and background. This full-time VA employee will be the liaison between the fellow and VA facility and affiliated university personnel. If qualified, the program director can also be the preceptor for the fellow. A brief biographical sketch or curriculum vita should be included in the appendix.
- If the Preceptor is a VA employee, provide the name, position, and brief background, including record of precepting or mentoring post-doctoral fellows. The preceptor must be doctorally prepared, qualified in the field of clinical research, and fully committed to the applicant's research training. A curriculum vita should be included in the appendix.

(c) Academic Institutions. Information should include, but is not limited to the following:

- Description of the affiliated academic institutions, including the extent of committed participation and support (e.g., staff commitments, space assignments, library access, and reduced rate for tuition fees for academic courses or continuing education programs). A letter of support or commitment should be included in the Appendix.
- Information about ongoing projects and individuals the fellow may collaborate in or with during the fellowship program.
- If the Preceptor is an employee of an academic institution, provide the name, position, and brief background, including record of precepting/mentoring post-doctoral fellows. This person must be doctorally prepared, qualified in the field of clinical or educational research, and fully committed to the applicant's research training. A curriculum vita should be included in the appendix.
- List of individuals in the academic institutions who will be involved in the fellowship program by providing clinical, educational, or research opportunities for the fellow. List the individuals' names, academic titles, status of VA employment (paid/WOC/none), roles in the fellowship program, and percent of time being dedicated to the fellowship. Brief biographic sketches (abbreviated curricula vitae), not to exceed three pages per person, should be included in the appendix to provide educational background, competitive research grant awards within the last three to five years (by title, source, time period, and dollar amount), selected relevant peer-reviewed publications (not to exceed six), and previous experience in working with or supervising post-doctoral fellows. Do not include persons who are only responsible for providing classroom or didactic instruction.

(d) Fellowship Curriculum Plan other than proposed research project or pilot project. Use the format shown in *Attachment A* of this program announcement. State the major goals and learning objectives that will assist the fellow in developing expertise in a specified area of research. Outline the specific knowledge and skills to be learned or developed by the post-doctoral fellow. Learning experiences that correspond to the program objectives must be included. Planned learning experiences should at least include:

- Research projects that are available for the fellow's participation
- Topics for the fellow's own program of studies or research
- Proposed academic courses or didactic education that support the fellow's development (e.g., advanced education in research methodology, statistics, and sciences or humanities related to nursing and the fellow's area of research)

- (e) Proposed research project or pilot study. Include an abstract (**must not exceed three pages**) that includes:
- Title of the proposed research
  - Introduction and statement of the problem
  - Research questions or hypotheses
  - Background and brief literature review
  - Statement of significance of the proposed research for the care of VA patients.
  - Research design, methods, and analysis plan. (Generally, the Veteran population should be the major component of the sample. See footnote 2 on page 2 regarding inclusion of non-Veteran populations).
- (f) Evaluation Plan. If evaluation criteria other than the criteria identified in section 7 of this program announcement will be used, please describe them.
- (3) Appendices must not exceed 20 pages excluding the curricula vitae of the applicant, program director, and preceptor.
- (a) Letter of application from the potential post-doctoral nurse fellow. The letter should briefly state background, area of research interest, career goals, including interest in VA career opportunities, and whether applying for full-time or part-time fellowship and number of hours per 2-week pay period if requesting a part-time fellowship.
- (b) Letters of support from the following people. Others, as appropriate may be included.
- VA facility's Nurse Executive. If a component of the fellowship program will be at another VA facility, the Nurse Executive at the second facility should also submit a letter of support.
  - VA facility Fellowship Program Director
  - Preceptor (if the program director also is the proposed preceptor, one letter of support is sufficient).
  - Dean or Chairperson of the relevant schools, colleges, or departments at participating academic institutions. Letters should make reference to joint activities between VA and the university, if applicable.
- (c) Curricula vitae or resumes of applicant, program director, and preceptor. (These do not count in page limits, but should be abbreviated if possible)
- (d) Biographical sketches or abbreviated curricula vitae (not to exceed three pages per person) for individuals in the VA facility and academic institutions who will be

involved in the fellowship program by providing clinical, educational, and research opportunities for the fellow. Do not include persons who are only responsible for providing classroom/didactic instruction.

## **6. REVIEW PROCESS**

An ad-hoc committee of scientists, nurse researchers and clinicians selected by OAA and the Office of Nursing Services will review program applications. The committee will evaluate specific items in the application that reflect:

a. Facility Commitment - evidence of a commitment from the VA facility to establish and support a Post-doctoral Nurse Fellowship Program; and degree of commitment for establishing the program from the affiliating institutions.

b. Demonstrated Nursing Research Capacities - qualifications for providing post-doctoral training opportunities in clinical or educational nursing research (e.g., VA facility's accomplishments in clinical or educational nursing research).

c. Fellowship Program Faculty/Staff and Preceptors - qualifications of faculty/staff and preceptors who will be involved in the program.

d. Fellowship Program Curriculum - clear understanding of the program's purpose, philosophy, goals and objectives, and specific learning experiences for the fellow.

e. Fellow's qualifications and goals.

f. Evaluation Plan.

## **7. PROGRAM EVALUATION**

a. Evaluation reports should be submitted to the Office of Academic Affiliations (10A2D) no later than one month after completion of each year of the fellowship and at the conclusion of the fellowship program if the fellow leaves before the end of the usual fellowship year. The evaluation reports should be e-mailed to [Mary.Dougherty@va.gov](mailto:Mary.Dougherty@va.gov).

b. The evaluation should include input from the fellow, VA program director and involved facility staff, and the preceptors. Evaluation must include these elements:

- (1) Review of the fellow's fellowship plan and attainment of the fellow's goals, objectives, and learning activities. Describe relevant activities that occurred that were not in the original fellowship plan as well as activities that were not able to be accomplished with reasons why not.

- (2) Plans for the second year for all fellows and for the third year for part-time fellows.
- (3) Fellow's satisfaction with the program, including suggestions for improvement both locally and nationally.
- (4) Descriptions of honors and presentations, posters, and publications by the fellow during the fellowship program. Copies of abstracts or complete documents should be submitted whenever possible. These may be posted on the OAA web site or cited in VA public affairs documents.
- (5) Employment of the fellow upon completion of the program. If not recruited to VA employment, why not and will the fellow have continuing involvement with VA activities?
- (6) Satisfaction of the Program Director, Preceptors, and other facility staff such as Chief of Staff, Associate Chiefs of Staff for Education or Research, Clinical Service Chief, and Service Line Manager related to roles in the program, the fellow's progress, and the program in general. Suggestions for program improvement both locally and nationally from these individuals are welcomed.
- (7) The outcome of the fellow's research

**8. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION** Contact Mary B. Dougherty, PhD, M.B.A., M.A., R.N., Office of Academic Affiliations (14), at [Mary.Dougherty@va.gov](mailto:Mary.Dougherty@va.gov) or at 202-461-9498.

**9. PROGRAM SCHEDULE**

Applications due in the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA), VA Central Office, Washington, DC.	COB, first Monday October, or May,
VA facilities notified of approval/non-approval of application	Not later than second Monday November, or June,
Fellowship begins (unless August/September funding is requested and approved by the Office of Academic Affiliations)	Any date during the year that is approved by OAA
Evaluation reports due to Office of Academic Affiliations	One month after completion of each year of fellowship and at the end of the fellowship if other than at the end of a fellowship year.

**1. SAMPLE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM CURRICULUM PLAN**

Long Term Goal #1: Establish a research program in intervention research related to the care of patients with hypertension and coronary artery disease with specialized focus of aging Veterans.

- a) Long Term Goal #2: Develop a strong team of researchers within the VHA, University of XXXXXX, and community agencies that can support post-doctoral studies related to the health care of patients with hypertension and coronary artery disease and their families across the lifespan.
- b)
- c) Long Term Goal #3: Improve quality of health care for Veterans with hypertension and coronary artery disease by disseminating research findings to improve clinical practice. FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM CURRICULUM

<b>Long Term Goal #1</b> : Establish a research program in intervention research related to the care of patients with hypertension and coronary artery disease with specialized focus of aging Veterans.			
<b>Short Term Goal (1)</b> : Further develop theoretical framework/model that will support doctoral dissertation research.			
<b>Learning Objectives</b>	<b>Learning Experiences</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Training Staff</b>
Increase understanding of the theoretical basis of intervention research r/t hypertension.	Independent literature review: review related literature on theoretical models, frameworks, theoretical basis of hypertension management and research.	Demonstrates through discussion or publication knowledge of . . . . .....	Dr. Anna Mocha
Enhance constructed "SBP Estimation Model"	Review previous work in theoretical model building, especially r/t hypertension research.		Dr. Mary Mitchell
			Dr. Joyce Brothers
			Dr. Katie Lee

**Short Term Goal (2):** Increase knowledge of statistical methods and computer applications used in interventions research.

Learning Objectives	Learning Experiences	Evaluation	Training Staff
Increase knowledge and skills in quantitative data analysis and use of _____(e.g., specific computer software).	Enrollment in Course X at the University of Y.  Data analysis of project A using the B statistical processes.	Present data analysis to . . . . .  . . . .	Dr. Al Berstein