**A CLINICAL FELLOWSHIP IN THE PSYCHIATRY OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES: THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING IN AN UNDERSERVED AREA.**

**Sarah O’Flanagan, Georges Loba-Gutierrez, & Rob Nicolson, Western University.**

**Objectives:**

Although psychiatric disorders occur at a higher rate in people with Developmental Disabilities (DD), the lack of training opportunities in medical school and residency with this population has led to most clinicians feeling inadequately trained to assess and treat such patients. This study examined the impact of a Clinical Fellowship in the Psychiatry of DD in the Developmental Disabilities Program in the Department of Psychiatry at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry at Western University which was designed to increase the capacity of psychiatrists in this area.

**Method:**

The fellowship utilizes a novel learning approach, leveraging the expertise in DD across the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry at Western. The fellow completed three-month rotations in inter-disciplinary clinics in neurology, developmental pediatrics, genetics, and rehabilitation medicine. Also, rather than spending blocks of time in psychiatry, the fellow spent four days each week throughout the academic year in two psychiatry clinics, one for children and one for adults with developmental disabilities. This model allows the fellow to see the same patients multiple times over the year, allowing them to develop expertise in the ongoing management of mental health problems in people with DD. Surveys regarding the role and the impact of the fellow were completed by supervisors at the completion of the fellowship and a semi-structured interview was completed with the fellow at the completion of training.

**Results:**

Data was analyzed and coded using grounded theory methods. 3 main themes emerged:

The fellow provided psychiatric expertise in non-psychiatric clinics, reducing wait times to see a psychiatrist.

The fellow provided education specific to DD and Mental Health to students and inter-disciplinary clinicians and teams across all clinics.

Having a fellow in clinic provided reciprocal opportunities for learning for everyone involved.

Supervising physicians reported overall that having a Clinical Fellow in the Psychiatry of Developmental Disabilities was extremely beneficial to their clinics and their patients. They, and the fellow also reported that the longitudinal, multi-disciplinary approach was critical to training the fellow.

**Discussion/Conclusions**

The purpose of the fellowship was to increase the number of physicians with expertise in DD. Based on the results from our first fellow we have achieved this goal, although continuation of the fellowship will allow us to collect more data. Based on the results from this study, the longitudinal model is integral to training, as is the participation in inter-disciplinary clinics.​

**Correspondence:**

Contact: Sarah O’Flanagan, BA (Hons), Program Coordinator, Developmental Disabilities Program, Department of Psychiatry, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, Western University.

[Sarah.oflanagan@lhsc.on.ca](mailto:Sarah.oflanagan@lhsc.on.ca)

Other authors: Georges Loba-Gutierrez, MD, FRCPC. Assistant Professor, Developmental Disabilities Program, Department of Psychiatry, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, Western University.

[Georges.lobagutierrez@sjhc.london.on.ca](mailto:Georges.lobagutierrez@sjhc.london.on.ca)

Rob Nicolson, MD, FRCPC. Chair, Developmental Disabilities Program, Department of Psychiatry, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, Western University.

[rnicolso@uwo.ca](mailto:rnicolso@uwo.ca)