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## **Preparing Tomorrow's Clinicians through Fellowships in Health Policy**

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## Preparing Tomorrow's Clinicians through Fellowships in Health Policy

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As an academic medical center, Thomas Jefferson University Hospital (TJUH) is charged not only with providing quality healthcare to its patients but also with preparing new clinicians to be ready for tomorrow's healthcare industry. Part of the challenge of readying future healthcare providers for the road that lies ahead is the quick and constant shifting of the healthcare landscape. On one horizon, the future is bright with potential: there is an abundance of new medical developments, an explosion of health information sources (i.e., the Internet), a wealth of innovative software solutions for health system integration, and a national focus on quality improvement. However, several blights on the healthcare landscape are shadowing the progress that has been made: medical errors are in the news and on the rise<sup>1</sup>, expenditures are escalating exponentially, and there is a growing uninsured population<sup>2</sup>. How is a young clinician to manage the unpredictable evolution of healthcare? And from the TJUH perspective, how can established Jefferson Health System clinicians and practice groups who have survived tumultuous changes of the past two decades help prepare their younger colleagues to navigate these sometimes rough waters? At the Office of Health Policy and Clinical Outcomes (OHP), one attempt to educate health policy newcomers is a unique set of fellowship opportunities geared toward shaping tomorrow's doctors, pharmacists, and other healthcare providers.

One such opportunity, the Aetna US Healthcare Fellowship at OHP, is designed to develop physicians that are capable of responding to the ever-changing demands of the healthcare industry. For the young physician, the year affords many professional opportunities:

- Career experience with physician leaders throughout the country;
- Educational opportunities with directors of one of the largest HMOs in the world;
- Attendance at the monthly Office of Health Policy conference, which attracts healthcare leaders from across the region;
- Project management experience designing and implementing collaborative outcomes studies;
- Didactic graduate work in epidemiology, biostatistics, clinical trials, and healthcare finances; and
- The chance to work and learn under the direction of one of the nation's top teams in health policy.

David B. Nash, MD, MBA, Associate Dean and Director of OHP, believes that these myriad educational experiences provide new physicians with the tools to wrestle with the tough issues in healthcare today.

Similarly, OHP offers several opportunities for pharmacists (and other providers), which are somewhat divergent from traditional pharmacy practice, but forward-minded in terms of healthcare. With U.S. health expenditures at \$1.1 trillion dollars in 1997 and projected to double by 2008,<sup>3</sup> the industry continues to seek ways to control these costs while preserving quality of care. Specially trained clinicians (physicians, pharmacists, nurses, etc.) can help healthcare leaders make policy decisions by investigating which pharmaceutical treatments, services, and products provide the best outcomes and offer the most cost-effective care. With the support of several major pharmaceutical companies (Knoll Pharmaceutical Company, SmithKline Beecham, and Janssen Pharmaceutica), the Office has co-sponsored fellowships in health economics and outcomes research since 1995. To date, all of the outcomes research fellows have had a pharmacy background; however, the fellowships are open to other healthcare providers also.

The definition of outcomes research (OR) is two-fold:

- the collection and analysis of data to determine value of health care products, procedures, services and programs, and
- the evaluation of the clinical, economic, quality of life, and patient satisfaction outcomes of care.<sup>4</sup>

Because OR contributes to improved quality and cost effectiveness in healthcare, individuals with OR experience are in greater demand than ever before. Post-graduate fellowship programs in OR have been developed across the country to train pharmacists and other clinicians to incorporate OR skills in various healthcare settings.

The two-year fellowships offered at OHP help clinicians to establish a foundation of academic and practical experiences focused on economic, clinical, and humanistic principles of OR. The first year is spent at the OHP where fellows are educated in research design, biostatistics, clinical economics, and health related quality of life principles through didactic coursework and research projects. The second year is spent at the sponsoring firm where fellows receive practical experience in outcomes research studies conducted in the pharmaceutical industry.

OHP trained fellows are prepared to continue their careers in OR in a variety of roles and settings: as strategic planners, product managers, or directors in the pharmaceutical industry; as formulary managers or consultants for managed health care organizations; and as researchers, professors, or project directors in academia. The four current fellows agree that one of the most valuable experiences offered by the OHP fellowships is the chance to do "hands-on" research in a professional setting with experts in industry *and* academia. The partnerships between OHP and the pharmaceutical companies bridge the gap between "theory" (education/training) and "practice" (professional work). For the fellows, this broad-based, practical approach exceeds fellowships that are primarily didactic.

For those interested in more information about OR fellowships nationwide, OHP has prepared a list of currently available health economic and outcomes research fellowships in the U.S. for the International Society for Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research (ISPOR). Please visit the ISPOR website for more information about these fellowship opportunities at [www.ispor.org](http://www.ispor.org). For specific information

Mark J. Bachleda, et al.: Preparing Tomorrow's Clinicians through Fellowship in Health Policy

pertaining to the OHP fellowships, please contact our office directly at (215) 955-6969.

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