

Thomas Jefferson University Health Economics and Outcomes Research Fellowships: A Personal Reflection

Walking down the streets of downtown New Orleans, I remember feeling privileged to be amongst such an accomplished group of individuals with the same goal in mind – patient centered healthcare. The theme of the 18th Annual International Society for Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research (ISPOR) Meeting was “patient-centered outcomes: focusing on the patient.” As the Mercer University Student ISPOR Chapter President, I had the opportunity to interact with students who like me were passionate about research. That evening I was introduced to fellows from Thomas Jefferson University and the idea of pursuing a Post-Doctoral fellowship in health economics and outcomes research.

The Thomas Jefferson University Health Economics and Outcomes Research (HEOR) Fellowship was started in 1994. Under the leadership of the Dr. David Nash, Dean of the College of Population Health (JCPH) (formerly, Jefferson School of Population Health and *Office of Health Policy*), Thomas Jefferson University approached companies within the pharmaceutical industry with the idea of training pharmacists in a post-doctoral fellowship. In the “looming possibility” of Hillary Care and the recognized lack of healthcare professionals trained to solve complex healthcare issues, academic institutions and persons in pharma shared vested interest in such collaborations.¹ Parallel with the inception of the fellowship program was the formation of ISPOR (formerly, the Association of Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research) in 1995. According to Dr. Maio, the current Program Director, Dr. Nash was able to envision the need for healthcare

professionals trained with the *tools* to be able to “connect the dots” in clinical outcomes and economic components.²

The JCPH Applied Health Economics and Outcomes Research Fellowship (AHEOR) program transpires over two years. Fellows work cross-functionally at Thomas Jefferson University and their respective sponsor company. Highlights of the program include: collaboration in the completion of outcomes research projects, added technical training (SAS programming, biostatistics), medical writing, and one-on-one mentoring. Additionally, fellows are supported to earn a Master’s of Science or Certificate in JCPH programs. The fellowship has been under the leadership of Dr. Vittorio Maio since 2014. Past directors include Dr. David Nash, Dr. Joseph Jackson and Dr. Laura Pizzi.

Current industry sponsors of the fellowship program include: Janssen Scientific Affairs, Novartis, and Ethicon. The first fellowships (1994) were sponsored through funding by Sandoz (Novartis) and GlaskoSmithKline. Janssen Scientific Affairs has partnered with Jefferson since 1996 serving as the longest running industry sponsor. Since 1996 Janssen has supported 18 fellows through matriculation of the program. Through the 21-year history of the program, a variety of pharmaceutical and medical device companies have also supported fellows including, but not limited to: Knoll Pharmaceuticals (Novartis), Rhone-Poulenc Rorer (Sanofi-Aventis Pharmaceuticals), and Daiichi Sankyo. Thomas Jefferson University has also sponsored two fellows through an academia-focused 2-3 year fellowship.



Dr. McRae is one of three 2015-2017 Thomas Jefferson University HEOR fellows. Dr. McRae is pictured here with Dr. David Nash (far left) and her two co-fellows, Dr. Varga and Mr. Chen. Jacquelyn McRae, PharmD (left) is sponsored by Janssen Scientific Affairs. Stefan Varga, PharmD (middle) is sponsored by Novartis. Bryan Po-Han Chen, MS (far right) is sponsored by Ethicon.

The JCPH AHEOR fellowship program is one of the longest running HEOR fellowship programs in the nation. With the transforming healthcare landscape, there is an increased need for persons with the skills to translate real-world problems into actionable solutions through research. Interestingly, the fellowship was formed at an appropriate time when the nation was on the brink of healthcare reform. I am grateful that such a program was developed to provide an environment for clinically trained individuals to cultivate outcomes research skills. I look forward to continuing participation in the fellowship program and mentoring students to pursue careers in outcomes research.

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REFERENCES

1. D. Nash, Telephone interview. September 3, 2015.
2. V. Maio, In-person interview. September 3, 2015.