

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

PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT

Pre-doctoral Nurse Fellowship Program

1. PURPOSE:

This fellowship program provides opportunities for registered nurses who are doctoral candidates to conduct their dissertation studies at VA facilities if the topics of the dissertations are relevant to the care of veterans¹. Fellows may be full-time for two years or part-time for three years. (See section 2.b.)

This program announcement provides policies and procedures for the fellowship program and instructions to interested and eligible nurses and to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities for submitting applications to the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA).

2. POLICY

a. This fellowship is for registered nurse doctoral candidates whose planned dissertation research has a clinical research focus that is relevant to the care of adult/aging veterans. Dissertation topics that are considered relevant to the care of veterans are in such areas as geriatrics, primary care, rehabilitation, spinal cord injury, home health care, women's health, mental health, substance abuse, and post-deployment health, and may focus on patient care outcomes related to health promotion, prevention of diseases, nursing care modalities, primary care, rehabilitation, home health care, health care systems administration, etc. (See footnote on page 1 and section 4g.)

b. Fellows may be either full-time (80 hours per 2-week pay period) for two years or part-time (minimum of 40 hours per pay period) for three years. Part-time fellows will receive a pro-rated stipend at the same hourly rate as full-time fellows. Continuation in the fellowship beyond the first year is subject to satisfactory performance evaluations.

c. The annual stipend for the Pre-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 annual stipend based on the annual rate. OAA will provide approved VA facilities with funding for stipends and for VA's share (7.65%) of Federal Insurance Contribution Act (FICA) and VA's share of health and life insurance premiums.

¹ *To be relevant to VA care of veterans, the research should involve a veteran population. However, there are situations in which inclusion of 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 sample of women or minority patient 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.*

d. Pre-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 facility for the VA's share of the premiums for these programs. Fellows must pay the employee's share of the premium.

e. The fellows will earn annual and sick leave under the General Schedule leave system (5 U.S.C., chapter 63) at the rate of 4 hours of sick leave and 4 hours of annual leave each full pay period for full-time fellows. Fellows with prior federal service may earn annual leave at a higher rate depending on the years of prior service. Part-time fellows earn sick and annual leave on a pro-rated basis. Fellows should be strongly encouraged to use their annual leave before the end of the fellowship program as the required lump-sum payment for unused annual leave at the end of the fellowship program will generally be a facility expense not reimbursed by OAA.

f. Fellows may not be paid from non-VA sources for the same times and activities of the fellowship program.

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

h. 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.

i. Any expenses connected with the fellow's dissertation activities or research must be supported by sources other than the Pre-doctoral Nurse Fellowship Program which only pays stipends and VA's share of insurance benefits. Transportation to the VA facility site and housing arrangements are the sole responsibility of the selected fellow.

j. Fellows who are recruited for this program will identify their VA fellowship in all reports, publications and presentations that occur during the fellowship and/or related to activities/research completed during the fellowship. Failure to do so may result in termination of the fellowship award or program by OAA. Fellows should provide OAA with an abstract for all publications and presentations based on the supported research.

k. Appointments will be made under 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1)(D). For PAID coding purposes, these employees will be identified by the use of occupation series and title code 0610-84-K4, pay plan code M, grade 00, step N.

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

3. VA FACILITY ELIGIBILITY

a. Resources and Environment: The facility must have clinical and patient care, research and education program activities that will support the proposed research activities of the pre-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 preceptor must have experience as a preceptor/mentor and research experience in nursing, biological, behavioral or other health related sciences, and must have knowledge of the research proposal approval process for both the university and the VA facility. The expertise of the preceptor must be congruent with the research interest of the fellow. It is encouraged that the preceptor has a faculty appointment at the university where the fellow is enrolled.

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 responsible for administrative oversight of the program and will be the liaison person between the fellow and appropriate VA facility and affiliated university personnel. The program director does not have to be doctorally prepared. If qualified, the nurse program director can also be the preceptor for the fellow.

d. Affiliated College/University: The VA facility must have established affiliations with college and university graduate programs in nursing or other related disciplines. The academic programs must be accredited by the nationally recognized accrediting bodies for the health care discipline. By the beginning of the fellowship program, the VA facility must have a signed affiliation agreement with the school in which the fellow is enrolled.

4. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

a. Be a citizen of the United States. No exception will be made.

b. Hold an active, current registration as a graduate professional nurse in a State, Territory or Commonwealth (i.e., Puerto Rico) of the United States or the District of Columbia.

c. Be able to meet the applicable credentialing and licensing requirements of VA. (Reference: VHA Handbook 1100.19, Credentialing and Privileging)

d. 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. Be enrolled in a doctoral program within a school/college accredited by a national accrediting body that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

f. Be classified as a doctoral candidate and have successfully completed all required courses and the comprehensive examination by the beginning of funding, which can be any date in the year that is approved by the Office of Academic Affiliations. IF the applicant is NOT a doctoral candidate at the time of application.

(1) a letter from the academic program should be included with the application to explain what the applicant must do to obtain candidate status, when the coursework will be completed, and when the results of the comprehensive examination will be available. The letter should also state the expectation that these requirements will be met by the intended start date of the fellowship program.

(2) and if the applicant is selected for the fellowship program, the applicant will not be allowed to start the program until documentation is received by OAA that the requirements have been met.

g. Proposed dissertation research must

- (1) reflect a clinical practice orientation with expected results that are relevant to the nursing care of veteran patients in VA facilities (see footnote on page one)
- (2) be approved by the applicant's graduate school dissertation committee, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) with jurisdiction, and the host VA facility's Research and Development (R&D) Committees by the beginning of the fellowship.
 - (a) If it is not possible to obtain approval by the dissertation committee, the IRB, and the VA R&D Committee prior to submission of the application, letters should be included from appropriate officials indicating that approval is anticipated prior to the date the fellowship is expected to begin.
 - (b) If selected, the applicant may **not** begin the fellowship until OAA receives documentation from the academic program and/or the VA facility that these approvals have been accomplished and send final approval of the fellow to the facility.
- (3) be able to be completed within the two-year time frame for a full-time fellow or within the three-year time frame for a part-time fellow.

5. APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

a. The VA facility should e-mail their proposal to Linda.McInturff@va.gov so that they will be received in OAA at least 60 days prior to the requested start date of the fellowship program. If for some reason you cannot e-mail your proposal, you may fax your proposal to Linda McInturff at 202-357-4057; however, an e-mail is preferable.

b. The application **must not exceed 37 single-spaced pages**, including the transmittal letter, core narrative, and appendices other than curricula vitae of the applicant, program director, and preceptor. The font must be at least 10 point and all margins must be at least one inch. The application packet must contain the following:

- (1) Transmittal letter from the VA facility Director stating
 - (a) that the facility is prepared to support the fellowship program.
 - (b) that the research proposal has been approved by the VA facility's Research and Development Committee, any subcommittees, and the IRB. If this approval is pending, relate current status and anticipated date of approval. Documentation of approval must be submitted to OAA as soon as possible.
 - (c) the name, routing symbol, e-mail address, telephone number and fax number of the fellowship program director at the VA facility and the preceptor.
 - (d) 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.
 - (e) the requested start date of the fellowship program.
- (2) Core narrative, which **must not exceed 25 pages**, is to: outline the proposed dissertation research; provide background on applicant, preceptor, program director and VA staff involved with the fellowship; state how the research is relevant to the care of veterans and

how the research results might be useful to VA; and demonstrate how VA facility resources will support the fellow.

The following areas must be addressed within this section:

(a) VA facility

- (1) Description of facility support, i.e., patient care services and clinical programs that are ongoing at the facility, how interprofessional activities are integrated into these programs, other VA facility community involvement in education of nurses as well as pre-doctoral clinical and administrative activities.
- (2) Description of clinical nursing research capacities, i.e., VA facility's accomplishments and other background characteristics that reflect qualifications for providing pre-doctoral training opportunities in clinical nursing research.
- (3) Summary of the qualifications of fellowship program director and faculty/staff who will be involved with the fellowship, i.e., provide names and position titles of individuals from each of the services who will collaborate with the program director and/or preceptor in providing clinical and research opportunities for the pre-doctoral nurse fellow. Include curricula vitae of the program director in the appendix.
- (4) If the preceptor is from the VA facility, provide the name, position, and brief background, including record of precepting/mentoring pre-doctoral students. This person must be doctorally prepared, qualified in the field of clinical research, and committed to assisting the applicant with the dissertation. A curriculum vita should be included in the appendix.
- (5) A statement of plans to recruit and retain the pre-doctoral nurse fellow into the VA system.
- (6) If the applicant is requesting training at another VA facility, then letters of support should be obtained from the initiating VA facility and the other VA facility.

(b) Applicant

- (1) Name, description of background, including undergraduate and graduate education; and name of dissertation advisor. Curricula vitae or résumé of the applicant should be included in the appendix and does not count toward page limits.
- (2) Short and long-term career goals

(c) Proposed dissertation research (must not exceed 10 pages)

- (1) Title and Purpose(s) of the Study: State the purpose(s) or specific aims of the study, including questions to be addressed and/or hypotheses to be tested.
- (2) Background/Preliminary Studies: Discuss the relevant background studies and if available, any preliminary studies conducted by the applicant.
- (3) Significance: State how the proposed research is relevant to care of veterans and how research results might be useful to VA researchers, managers, and clinicians.

- (4) Study Design/Methods: Discuss the study design, data collection methods, study population, study site(s), and data analyses plan. Include in the discussion such items as the unit of analysis, comparison points, types of data to be collected, approach (randomization, observational, etc.), and end points to be evaluated. Discuss human subjects considerations pertaining to need for informed consent and human subjects review committee approvals and compliance with HIPAA.
- (5) Proposed time line for completion of major stages of the research process.

(d) Academic Program

- (1) Describe the extent of the committed participation and support of the academic program in which the applicant is enrolled.
- (2) Letter of support from the dean/chairperson, making reference to joint activities between VA and university, if appropriate, and verification of applicant's status. (See instructions regarding content in paragraph 5b(3)(b). Include letter in the appendix.)
- (3) If the preceptor is from the academic program, provide the name, position, and brief background, including record of precepting/mentoring pre-doctoral students. This person must be doctorally prepared, qualified in the field of clinical research, and committed to assisting the applicant with the dissertation. A curricula vitae should be included in the appendix.

(e) Fellowship Evaluation, if different or in addition to the criteria in section 9 of this program announcement.

(3) Appendices must not exceed 10 pages, excluding the curricula vitae.

- (a) Biographical sketch, résumé, or curriculum vitae of program director, preceptor and applicant (not included in page limit but should be abbreviated).
- (b) Letter from chairperson of the graduate department where the applicant is enrolled stating that:
 - the applicant is or is anticipated to be a doctoral candidate by the requested start date of the fellowship program. If not yet a doctoral candidate, state what is needed to obtain candidacy status and the projected time line.
 - the applicant is approved to pursue research for the completion of the dissertation. If not currently approved, state what needs to be accomplished to be approved and the projected time line.
 - the applicant's research design has been approved by a dissertation committee or is anticipated to be approved by the requested start date of the fellowship program. If not yet approved, state what needs to be accomplished to be approved and the projected time line.
- (c) Letter from the VA facility Research Office stating that the dissertation research proposal has been approved by the local Research and Development Committee, any necessary subcommittees, and the IRB. If this approval is pending, current status and anticipated date of approval notification should be stated. Documentation of approval must be submitted to OAA as soon as possible.

- (d) Letters of support and other relevant information. Specifically include letters of support from the proposed fellowship program director, the preceptor, other individuals who will be involved in the fellowship program, and the Nurse Executive at the VA facility.

6. REVIEW PROCESS:

a. Proposals will be reviewed by an ad-hoc committee of scientists, nurse researchers and clinicians selected by OAA.

b. The following criteria will be used for evaluating the applications:

(1) Facility and Affiliating School's Commitment and Resources

- (a) Evidence of a commitment from the VA facility and affiliating institution to establish and support a Predoctoral Nurse Fellowship Program and support the career path of the pre-doctoral fellow;
- (b) Resources and environment of the host VA facility showing research and clinical care programs supportive of the applicant's research proposal;

(2) Preceptor's track record in and area of research as demonstrated by publications, awards, and previously funded research, and experience in mentoring

(3) Applicant

- (a) Professional and research record to date
- (b) Evidence of satisfactory completion of didactic course work in doctoral program, doctoral candidacy, and approval by academic program, IRB, and VA research committee to pursue the doctoral dissertation research
- (c) Proposed career goals
- (d) Evidence of dedication to the care of veterans

(4) Research Proposal

- (a) Proposed research questions, design, and methodology
- (b) Relevance and applicability to the care of veterans
- (c) Able to be completed during the fellowship period

7. NURSE FELLOWSHIP GUIDELINES:

a. Within the first 4 weeks of the fellowship period, the calendar plan of the fellow's expected activities that was submitted as part of the application should be refined as appropriate. This plan should be a product resulting from consultations between the fellow and the preceptor, and should reflect the approximate apportionment of time among categories of the fellow's planned activities. Although the apportionment of time among activities will be based on the fellow's needs, the total program must be well balanced and should include interprofessional involvement related to clinical nursing programs at the VA facility.

b. Developmental activities might include collaboration in research projects, development of pilot studies, participation in structured education and training courses, tutorial arrangements, consultation with nursing care experts, independent study, and supervised clinical experiences. When considering these activities and planned schedules, fellows must take into account restrictions on time spent outside the VA facility. (Ref: Section 6.d.).

c. Within 12 months after the end of the fellowship period, each fellow will be required to submit a copy of the dissertation to the VA facility and to OAA. The fellow's dissertation, publications, and presentations emanating from the dissertation must state that the Department of Veterans Affairs supported the work.

8. PROGRAM EVALUATION:

a. The Predoctoral Nurse Fellowship Program must be evaluated at the end of each year and at the end of the program. The evaluation should include input from the fellow, the program director and VA facility staff, and the preceptor. Evaluation criteria for this program will include the following:

- (1) Review of the fellow's fellowship plan and attainment of the fellow's goals. Describe relevant activities that occurred that were not in the original fellowship plan as well as planned activities that were not accomplished with explanations.
- (2) Plans for 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 presentations, posters, publications, honors, etc. by or for the fellow during the fellowship program. Copies of abstracts or complete documents must be submitted to OAA. These may be posted on the OAA website.
- (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) Evaluation of the fellowship program, his/her role, the fellow's progress and suggestions for program improvement both locally and nationally by the Program Director, Preceptor(s), and one other facility staff such as Chief of Staff, Associate Chief of Staff for Education or Research, Clinical Service Chief, Service Line Manager.
- (7) The outcome of the fellow's dissertation research

b. Evaluation reports should be submitted to the Office of Academic Affiliations (143) within one month after completion of the each year and after completion of the program. The evaluation reports, along with transmittal memos from the VA facility director, should be e-mailed to Linda McInturff at Linda.McInturff@va.gov.

9. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

For additional information contact Linda D. Johnson, Ph.D., R.N., Director, Associated Health Education, Office of Academic Affiliations (143), VA Central Office, Washington, D.C., at (202) 357-4014, or e-mail at Linda.Johnson@va.gov.

10. PROGRAM SCHEDULE:

Applications due in the Office of Academic Affiliations (OAA), VA Central Office, Washington, DC	Any time during the year
VA facilities notified of approval/non-approval of application	Within 60 days of receipt of application
Fellowship begins	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.