VA PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING

A webinar for graduate school DCTS to learn more about VA training
Sponsored by APA Division 18 VA Section and the VA Psychology Training Council
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VA CULTURE

Dana Holohan, Ph.D.
Director of Training, Salem VAMC
Chair- VA Psychology Training Council
Enormous government-run health care organization.

Seen one VA, seen one VA though there are some commonalities.

Mission driven-training and research, providing health care for American’s Veterans

Interest in Veteran’s perceptions and values. Heterogeneous but overall very patriotic. Important part of patient’s identity.

Staff often here as their way to “serve”. Sense of gratitude and purpose.

Recovery oriented, Veteran-centric.

VA has universal requirements for Mental Health care and services (e.g., timely access to care (within 20 days), EBPs, interprofessional team emphasis, suicide prevention, etc.)

Accountability is key, also government oversight.

Work in a very large bureaucracy:

  Challenges: Human Resources, policies and procedures, time keeping, onboarding, leave accrual/usage

  Strengths: Resources (large investment into training programs, medical records, EBPs)

Success in this culture: diligent and flexible at the same time, radical acceptance

Professional environment, tours, can be adjustment from grad school for some (745-430 tour, etc.)
WHY CONSIDER VA TRAINING?

Amy Silberbogen, Ph.D., ABPP
Director of Training, VA Boston Postdoctoral Fellowship Program
Chair-Elect- VA Psychology Training Council
WHY CONSIDER TRAINING AT VA?

- Commitment to education and training (rather than billable hours)
- Experience with evidence based practice (measurement based care)
- Diverse clinical training experiences, including interprofessional training
- Social justice/public service work
- Exposure to multiple roles of a psychologist (broad range of career trajectories)
- Pipeline for VA internships, VA postdocs, or future VA employment
- Stable funding for internship and postdoc
PREPARING STUDENTS FOR VA TRAINING

KRISTIN RODZINKA, PHD, ABPP
Board Certified in Clinical Psychology
Trauma Recovery Programs Manager
Co-Director of Training, Psychology
Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychology, Wright State University
PREPARING STUDENTS FOR VA TRAINING

Develop ability to seek and be open to feedback
Nurture expectation to be both encouraged and challenged
Orient to professional deportment expected in a Medical Center environment
Exposure to EBPs, structured diagnostic interviewing, and assessment
Case conceptualization
PREPARING STUDENTS FOR VA TRAINING

Develop strong foundation in assessment skills

Programs often want both academic and clinical experience to include:

- Appropriate test selection
- Understanding reliability, validity, and limits of a test
- Test interpretation skills
- Integrated report writing skills

Many VAs have minimum expectations for administration and scoring of both cognitive measures and objective personality assessments, as well as integrated reports.

Making sure applicants have at least the minimum requirements for assessment is important.
TRAINEE QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDENTIALS VERIFICATION LETTER (TQCVL)

Jeffrey Bates, Ph.D.
Associate Director, Associated Health Education (acting)
Office of Academic Affiliations (10X1)
Discovery, Education, Affiliates, and Networks
Dept. of Veterans Affairs
Required for all health profession trainees
Stipend paid trainees must be US Citizens
Protections from personal liability
TQCVL serves as documentation of the trainee meeting requirements for appointment
Selective Service requirements
https://www.npdb.hrsa.gov/ (National Practitioner Data Bank)
https://exclusions.oig.hhs.gov/ (List of Excluded Individuals and Entities)
TQCVL – PURPOSE

Allows for confirmation of the following:

- Enrolled or accepted in the accredited or VA sponsored program
- Primary source verification of qualifications and/or credentials
- Qualified and has required credentials to participate in the training program
- Eligible for appointment to a Federal Government position
- Physically and mentally fit to perform essential functions of the training program
- Immunized following CDC guidelines and VHA policies for healthcare workers
Am I eligible - https://www.va.gov/oaa/app-forms.asp


Selective Service - https://www.sss.gov/
DEBUNKING MYTHS ABOUT VA TRAINING

Jamylah Jackson, PhD, ABPP
Co-Chair of the VA Psychology Training Council’s Multicultural and Diversity Committee
Director of Training at the Dallas VA Medical Center
MYTH #1: VA PRACTICUM IS A MUST

Applicants can be competitive without having completed previous practicum or internship training within VA.

Previous training demonstrates interest in the population and a basic knowledge of the EMR and some acronyms (lacking this knowledge is not a deal-breaker or deterrent for most programs).

For most VA training programs, experience working with the clinical populations consistent with those seen in VA is enough.
MYTH #2:
VA IS WHERE OLD MEN GO TO SEEK CARE

Not False, however in addition to older veterans, the VA services a growing number of younger veterans (veterans of the Iraq/Afghanistan conflicts)

VA hospitals service a very broad and diverse patient population

VA’s are home to specialized women’s programs, Military Sexual Trauma programs (for men and women), and LGBTQ specific programming

VA’s typically offer a number of services and can be a one stop to shop for integrated care
MYTH #3:
VA TRAINING IS FOR THOSE WANTING EXPERIENCE WITH PTSD

While VA is known for treating PTSD, the veteran population is diverse in background and presenting clinical complaints.

VA is for those wanting to broaden their experience with diagnosing and treating complex individuals with a myriad of clinical and psychosocial concerns.

VAs offer experience with a variety of programs trainees might not otherwise gain much experience with including BHIPs, PCMHI, Behavioral Medicine, Geropsychology, LGBT clinics, and Women’s issues.
MYTH #4:
VA TRAINING PROGRAMS PREFER PHD (OR PSYD) CANDIDATES

Similarly a misconception can be that VAMCs always prefer clinical vs counseling doctoral candidates.

Within staffing at VA medical centers, distinctions are not made between clinical and counseling psychologists nor between psychologists with PhDs vs PsyDs.

It’s more important that a candidate have some experience with the clinical populations we serve (diagnostically, not necessarily that they’ve worked with veterans).

Programs within VA have different values; seen one VA, seen one VA.

Some programs put a heavier emphasis on extent of research background and training than others.
QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL