With the recent addition of several new national training centers and sponsors, including the National Institute on Aging (NIA), the program has taken on a new name: The Medical Student Training in Aging Research (MSTAR) Program. This name will be used by the program sponsors and national training centers, so the program identity is consistent and easily recognized nationwide.

Please help spread the word about the Medical Student Training in Aging Research (MSTAR) Program. The next application deadline is February 7, 2007. Some suggestions on local program promotion are included in this newsletter.


Administered by: The American Federation for Aging Research (AFAR) and the National Institute on Aging (NIA)

This online newsletter provides news, information, and updates about the Medical Student Training in Aging Research (MSTAR) Program to program directors, current and former student scholars, mentors and others involved in the program.

PLEASE HELP US DISSEMINATE THIS NEWSLETTER to medical students and others in your institution. It is one of the best ways to promote this valuable geriatrics program to potential applicants. Thank You!

This newsletter is published 3 times a year. Watch for the next issue in December 2006.
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2005 Program Scholar Wins the 2006 AGS Student Researcher Award

It's after 11:30 on a Friday night in July, and Joy Guerrieri-Bang, a 2005 Program Scholar, is studying for her classes at the University of New England College of Medicine (UNE) in Biddeford, Maine, where she recently started her third year. Perhaps it is this strong work ethic that helped Guerrieri-Bang win the 2006 American Geriatrics Society (AGS) Student Researcher Award. Each year, the Student Researcher Award is presented to the student who submits the most outstanding student abstract for the AGS Annual Meeting, based on originality, scientific merit, and relevance of the research.

Guerrieri-Bang completed her summer research program at UCLA with Dr. Alison Moore as her mentor. Her project was called "The Impact of At-Risk Drinking on the Development of Disability Among Middle-Aged and Older Persons." She used a criterion developed by Dr. Moore called CARET to screen at-risk drinking among different groups of older people. Guerrieri-Bang did a cross-sectional study using the Health and Retirement Survey (HRS), through which she was able to gather a large cohort of people in a short time period.

Guerrieri-Bang studied three groups of drinkers: at-risk drinkers, moderate drinkers, and abstainers. A significant number of drinkers from the HRS who were diagnosed with depression, gout, or diabetes or who were taking multiple hypertension medications were considered at-risk drinkers. This was determined in part by the number of drinks they consumed each week. She found that people who are at-risk drinkers have a significant risk of developing disability. She also found that abstainers are at greater risk for developing disability than people who drink moderate amounts of alcohol. "The purpose of this project is to help clinicians identify healthy habits in their patients instead of just asking them if they drink and having them say they don't drink that much," Guerrieri-Bang says. "The clinician should really ask them how much they're drinking and consider that relative to their lifestyle, their diagnoses, and the drugs they're taking, because there are more risk factors, especially as we get older."

As the 2006 AGS Student Researcher Award recipient, Guerrieri-Bang presented her research at the AGS Annual Meeting Presidential Poster Session in addition to the NIA/AFAR/Hartford Student Poster Session. "It was awesome!" she recalls. "It was the largest poster presentation I've ever been to."

Guerrieri-Bang admits to being shocked when she learned she had won the award. "I was flattered," she recalls. "It was validating, because I worked really hard." Dr. Moore, however, was not surprised. "Joy deserved to win the award because she has original ideas and is able to carry them out effectively and creatively," she says. "It was a pleasure to work with her on the project. She took the research in new directions."

Guerrieri-Bang's first job as a teenager was helping older people in her neighborhood. "I fell in love with their stories," she recalls. "Older people are living history books." She knew from these experiences that she wanted to go into geriatrics. Taking part in the Medical Student Program helped foster and sustain
that interest. “It was fantastic to be in a group of caring, self-motivated, and happy people who like what they do. It confirmed that this is a really awesome field,” she recalls.

Currently, Guerrieri-Bang is the president of the Medicine and Aging Club at UNE. This year, the club held its first student research conference, and 40 percent of the presentations were geriatrics-related. She is delighted that the students who gave these presentations are interested in continuing their work in geriatrics. She gives a large amount of credit for this to her mentor at UNE, Dr. Marilyn Gugliucci. “Dr. Gugliucci has created a lot of enthusiasm for geriatrics at our school,” Guerrieri-Bang says. In fact, it was Dr. Gugliucci who urged her to apply for the Medical Student Program.

In the future, Guerrieri-Bang dreams of opening a wellness clinic that will incorporate geriatrics with mind, body, and health concepts. For now, though, she simply looks forward to starting her clinical rotations!

A Record Finish for the Medical Student Program

Jackie Yuen did not plan to set a record when she began her 2005 summer research project at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City. She had such a great time doing it, however, that she took the project from research to completed manuscript in less than a year – one of the fastest turnaround times ever for the Medical Student Program. But Yuen did not sacrifice quality for speed. She recently learned that her paper was accepted by the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society and will be published in November. “I’m very excited!” she says.

Yuen’s project was a qualitative study of a Cornell home visitation program that third- and fourth-year medical students participate in as part of their primary care coursework. The students do house calls with a geriatrics team and observe the doctor-patient interaction in the patient’s home, focusing on the psychosocial aspects. Yuen interviewed students who recently completed the home visit program as well as those who completed it a few years ago. She sought to determine how the program affected students’ attitudes and impressions about caring for older adults with chronic illness.

Yuen’s findings were encouraging. “Students noticed a change in the physician-patient relationship when visits occurred in the patient’s home. The power shifted from the physician to the patient,” she explains. “This shift helped facilitate rapport and better communication between the patient and the doctor. More time was given to the patient during a home visit, and the patient set the conversational tone.” Students appreciated the opportunity to evaluate home safety and potential falls risks during these visits. Finally, students observed that being in a comfortable home environment had a positive impact on a patient’s health and sense of well-being.

Yuen worked with two mentors on her project: Lisa Breckman, a social worker who helped coordinate the house call program, and Dr. Cary Reid. “I couldn’t have asked ask for better mentors,” she says. “They were extremely supportive. They gave me a lot of flexibility and guidance.” She says that an ongoing relationship with her mentors after the summer program was over – they had long distance conference calls nearly once a week for several months – helped her complete her project so quickly.

Another factor in Yuen’s speedy completion of the project was her dedication and drive. “Jackie took the initiative regarding all aspects of her study, from getting the project approved by the local Institutional Review Board to reviewing drafts of her paper in regularly scheduled meetings,” recalls Dr. Reid. “This tenacity helped her face and successfully overcome unexpected obstacles along the way.” For example,
Yuen’s study population included medical students, interns, and residents with extremely hectic schedules. She spent long hours and demonstrated exceptional persistence in locating, recruiting, and surveying them.

Perhaps the primary reason for Yuen’s quick turnaround time, however, was simply her enthusiasm for her project. “I had a really fun time working on it, and the results were so positive,” she recalls.

It’s no surprise, then, that Yuen describes her time in the Medical Student Program as “a really great experience. Cornell did a great job of showing me what geriatrics is about in different settings, both in the clinic and outside in the community. It was really valuable.”

Yuen is currently in her third year at the University of Michigan Medical School. Based on her experiences in the Medical Student Program, she hopes to conduct further research in geriatrics education. Dr. Reid, for one, hopes she will return to Cornell for her residency/fellowship training. “Jackie was a wonderful mentee,” he says. “She is a conscientious and highly personable individual who continually seeks to improve her level of performance. These are qualities that will certainly enhance her success as a future physician leader.”

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**Encouraging Diversity in Geriatric Medicine and Research**

Minorities are underrepresented in the field of geriatric medicine. Crystal Simpson, MD, MHS, a 1995 Medical Student Program Scholar, is hoping to change that. Dr. Simpson is currently an assistant professor in the Division of Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. She serves as the program director and principal investigator for Hopkins’ summer student program’s NIA T35 training grant. Prior to receiving the T35 grant, Dr. Simpson directed a program entitled the “Johns Hopkins Geriatrics Summer Scholars,” which was specifically designed to expose minority medical students to geriatric medicine and gerontology.

Last September, Dr. Simpson published an article in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, entitled, “The Johns Hopkins Geriatric Summer Scholars Program: A Model to Increase Diversity in Geriatric Medicine.” Her enthusiasm for the program shines through when she discusses it. She rattles off statistics almost as effortlessly as she would the ABC’s.

The Hopkins program is now open to all students, not just minorities. It began in 2002 with six students, all black females. In 2003, there were only four students, but in its third year, the program expanded to 10 students who were a mixture of minority students. In 2005, the NIA T35 training grant started, and the program grew to 17 students in both 2005 and 2006, embodying a diverse racial and cultural mix.

The Hopkins program’s success is reflected in its students’ accomplishments. Many have continued in geriatric medicine, and have gone on to receive awards and accomplish other achievements. From the first class, three students became Hartford/AFAR Medical Student Scholars, two won National Medical Fellowships, one participated in the Technical Assistance Workshop, and one won a Doris Duke Clinical Research Fellowship. A student in the second class also won a National Medical Fellowship. A student from the third year of the program returned to the University of Maryland and started an AGS student chapter. One of last year’s students won best basic science poster at the AGS Annual Meeting Presidential Poster Session, and others have already published papers.

Dr. Simpson gushes about the Hopkins students like a proud parent whose child just scored the game-winning point. “You watch them blossom from their first year and go on to become doctors. The growth process and change is wonderful to witness,” she says. “It’s a privilege to be able to participate in that.”
Dr. Simpson herself became interested in geriatrics during her third year at New Jersey Medical School, when she received a Hartford/AFAR Medical Student Scholarship. She completed her project at Hopkins, studying nutrition in older adults and what happens to them after an illness. “My experience in the student program is what let me know that geriatrics was the right field for me,” she recalls.

After graduating from medical school, Dr. Simpson completed a family medicine residency and then returned to Hopkins to do a geriatrics fellowship. It was then that she got involved in the Hopkins Geriatrics Summer Research Scholars Program. “Once a student participates in our program, he or she is always a part of our geriatrics family. The faculty follows the students throughout their careers, writing recommendation letters and offering them advice. All of the faculty here are really supportive of the program and enjoy teaching, so the students love being with them,” Dr. Simpson says. “The program really changes the students’ minds about what geriatrics means.”

Dr. Simpson continues to follow the careers of former program participants. She hopes that more students will be drawn to the Hopkins Summer Program in the future. If you would like more information about the program, you can email her at cfsimpson@jhmi.edu.

Promoting the MSTAR Program at Your Medical School

Here are some ideas on promoting the program, based on successful efforts of medical schools across the country:

- Distribute information through:
  - School-wide assemblies or information fairs on scholarship opportunities for medical students
  - Medical school Web sites (We'll be happy to establish a hyperlink between AFAR's Web site and your medical school Web site)
  - Geriatrics interest groups or AGS student chapter meetings
  - In your medical school library, student affairs office or other appropriate offices or departments

- E-mail this newsletter to students at your school. Archived newsletters also contain inspiring stories from current and former program scholars and geriatrics leaders. They can be found at: http://www.afar.org/MedNews.html.

- Serve as a Program Ambassador for medical students. It's a minor time commitment and it's one of the most effective ways to attract new students to the program. How you serve as a Program Ambassador is up to you, but it can be as simple as organizing small meetings to talk about the program or sending emails to the student listserv. Program Ambassadors can be:
  - Medical students who have participated in the program
  - Leaders in geriatrics/gerontology who can provide students with an overview of the field as well as specific information on the program

- AFAR has an 8-minute video about the program that can be viewed online or shown at medical student gatherings. If you'd like a copy, please contact hattie@afar.org or go to www.afar.org/pdfs/Medical%20Student%20video_LAN.wmv to view the video on-line.
Useful Links

Medical Student Training in Aging Research (MSTAR) Program information and online application – www.afar.org/medstu.html

American Geriatrics Society Student Chapters – www.americangeriatrics.org/education/geristudents/EstablishAGSchapter/chapters_list.shtml

American Medical Student Association (AMSA) Geriatrics Specialty Forum – www.amsa.org/ger

American Association of Medical College – www.aamc.org
Recent information on AAMC grants to eight medical schools for the development or expansion of medical student-initiated community service programs, including some related to geriatrics. For more information about the AAMC Caring for Community Grant Program, go to http://www.aamc.org/about/awards/cfc.htm.

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If you have news or announcements you would like mentioned in our next newsletter, please forward them to grants@afar.org.