Stellar Potential
Medical Student Training in Aging Research (MSTAR) Program

The MSTAR Program is administered by:
American Federation for Aging Research

About the American Federation for Aging Research
The American Federation for Aging Research (AFAR) is a nonprofit organization supporting and working to advance healthier aging through biomedical research. In partnership with foundations, corporations, individuals, and the National Institute on Aging, AFAR has provided more than $113 million to nearly 2,500 early- and mid-career scientists from many of the nation’s leading academic institutions.

AFAR supports a broad spectrum of basic, clinical, and health-services research aimed at increasing healthy human lifespan. AFAR programs also make substantial investments in developing university faculties in gerontology- and geriatrics-related fields, with the ultimate goal of building a cadre of new and early-career investigators in aging research and geriatric medicine.

AFAR’s work has led to significant advances in understanding aging processes, age-related diseases, and healthy aging practices. AFAR communicates news of these innovations to the public through its consumer newsletter Lifelong, organizational web site www.afar.org, and two educational web sites, InfoAging (www.infoaging.org) and Health Compass (www.healthcompass.org).

This program is also administered by the National Institute on Aging.

MSTAR
Developing Tomorrow’s Leaders in Geriatric Medicine and Aging Research

For more than a decade, the Medical Student Training in Aging Research (MSTAR) Program has offered medical students from around the nation an in-depth preview of the exciting and rewarding possibilities of a career in geriatric medicine and research.

Each year, with mentoring from top experts in the field, some 120 of these future physicians and faculty enjoy a dynamic research and academic immersion. Many go on to become leaders in the nation’s most prestigious healthcare institutions as researchers, administrators, and even policymakers.

Since 1994, the program has trained well over 1,000 students from more than 100 medical schools, and will train many more—with your help. In this publication, you will learn more about MSTAR and how you can contribute to the future success and growth of this extraordinary program.
Where Stars Begin to Shine

The MSTAR Program offers medical students a rare opportunity to spend an eight-to-twelve week period of discovery in geriatrics and aging-related research, working with scientific leaders at some of the nation’s best medical schools.

Why is this important? During the next two decades, the number of older adults in the U.S. is projected to increase from 37 million to 70 million. Yet according to a recent report from the Institute of Medicine, geriatrics specialists are in critically short supply. As of 2007, there were only 7,128 certified geriatricians in the U.S., and that number is expected to increase by less than 10 percent through 2030. To address these significant challenges, the field needs to attract more physicians into research, teaching, and clinical practice. That’s where MSTAR comes in.

The program, initiated by The John A. Hartford Foundation and soon joined by others such as The Cleveland Foundation, the Lillian R. Gleitsman Foundation, The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation and others, introduces the best-and-brightest physicians-in-training to the field of geriatric medicine. Each of these future leaders participates in a research project, chosen with the help of an assigned mentor, for eight to twelve weeks. Afterward, they produce a journal-style paper on the results of their work and present a poster at an annual meeting of the American Geriatrics Society (AGS). Many project papers, with students listed as first-author, have appeared in peer-reviewed journals.

MSTAR scholars, on average, receive a $1,700 monthly stipend, as well as a stipend for travel to the AGS meeting. This modest investment can yield an impressive return—a lifelong career in geriatric medicine that will improve the care and well-being of the growing number of older patients.

A large number of former scholars are now in geriatrics-related careers, and their early exposure to geriatrics training has not only enhanced their care of older patients but it has also served to engage them as program ambassadors to encourage others to enter the field.

"Given the demographic realities of the next 20 years, our healthcare system desperately requires more researchers in geriatrics and more clinicians trained to meet the unique needs of older patients. The MSTAR Program is a powerful and cost-effective vehicle for introducing talented physicians to the field."

Corinne H. Rieder, EdD, Executive Director, The John A. Hartford Foundation
James Rudolph, MD, SM

"The MSTAR Program was unbelievably instrumental in my career, and my goal is to make it just as instrumental in the careers of others," says 1997 scholar Dr. James Rudolph. Dr. Rudolph was a fourth year medical student at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine at the time, and he credits that summer's experience not only with solidifying his interest in geriatrics, but also with getting his foot in the door at Harvard.

"For me that was crucial. It resulted in my receiving a great letter of recommendation, which helped me get into a residency at Brown. Afterward, coming back to Harvard for a fellowship seemed like a natural transition, and I hit the ground running, because I knew who was good to work with."

In 2003, Dr. Rudolph completed a circle of sorts when he became co-director of MSTAR's National Training Center at Harvard Medical School, and since then he's seen the program improve and evolve every year. In fact, his most recent group of scholars has proven the most motivated and talented yet. The student mix, as well as the overall interest and enthusiasm in geriatrics were at a level he had never seen before, and he feels some of them may well go on to become stars and leaders in geriatric medicine. The relationship between scholars and mentors worked out particularly well, perhaps because for the first time the students—all from other schools—were encouraged to find their own mentors among the Harvard faculty.

Today, in addition to his efforts on behalf of the MSTAR Program, Dr. Rudolph does both research and clinical work for the VA Boston Healthcare System and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, with a focus on delirium and cognitive impairment after bypass surgery.

Nationally Renowned Training Centers
Supported by the National Institute on Aging

Most MSTAR scholars travel to one of seven National Training Centers, supported by the National Institute on Aging. These are located at Harvard Medical School; Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine; David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles; University of California, San Diego School of Medicine; University of Hawaii School of Medicine; University of Michigan School of Medicine; and University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Alternatively, for students at a limited number of qualified medical schools, scholars can train at their own institution. Wherever they participate, MSTAR scholars enjoy an intense and enriching experience that lifts their career trajectory and provides valuable exposure to the world of geriatrics.
On the Horizon

The MSTAR Program has established itself as a premier career development opportunity for talented medical students. Today, hundreds of applicants who meet the program’s rigorous selection criteria—demonstrated academic excellence, an interest in geriatrics, and the potential for significant career achievement—compete annually for a limited number of openings. Unfortunately, this means that for every individual accepted into the program, many other promising students, even those with real stellar potential, are turned away.

Given the critical need for more researchers, clinicians, policymakers, and leaders in geriatrics, AFAR recognizes that merely sustaining the MSTAR Program is not enough. The time has come to expand. To that end, we are currently establishing the MSTAR Partnership Fund, which will offer individuals, corporations, foundations, and government agencies an exciting opportunity to become partners in supporting the program. Through donations, bequests, and endowments, this fund will support a significant increase in the number of scholarships available and ensure the MSTAR Program’s existence in perpetuity.

Building a Career

Julie Bynum, MD, MPH

“What may seem like a brief summer project through the MSTAR Program, is an important building block where you can gain significant skills—and these pieces build over time,” says former MSTAR scholar, Dr. Julie Bynum. For her, the pieces have added up to a rapidly rising career in geriatrics.

Dr. Bynum carried out her MSTAR research project under the mentorship of Bruce Leff, MD, at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, working with him on his Hospital at Home program, an innovative care model designed to provide acute level care in older patients’ homes. She went on to complete both an MPH and an MD at Johns Hopkins before accepting a residency and then a chief residency in internal medicine at the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. While there, she received two important grants—the AGS/Pfizer Outcomes Research Fellowship and the Robert Wood Johnson Physician Faculty Scholar Award.

The following year, she returned to Hopkins with a Hartford/AFAR Academic Geriatrics Fellowship to study healthcare utilization and the influence of co-morbid conditions in treating Alzheimer’s disease.

Dr. Bynum now works in the clinic, classroom, and research institute as an assistant professor at Dartmouth Medical School. Recently, the former MSTAR scholar received the prestigious Breson Career Development Award in Aging Research. As for her long range plans, she allows that they will continue to follow the path that once brought her to the MSTAR Program. “I’m pushing on the issues of how we organize care and continuity for the oldest old,” she says. “I ask questions with my research that can influence health policy decisions, so what we are learning can have a real impact.”
Since 1994, the MSTAR Program has been shaping the future of geriatrics and gerontology by captivated the interest and cultivating the stellar potential of the nation’s most promising physicians-in-training. In its unequalled effort to address the health needs of a rapidly growing older adult population and expand the pool of geriatrics professionals, the program has already seen many of its alumni reach top positions of administrative, academic, and policymaking leadership at some of the most prestigious research institutions in the country. Others have gone on to establish successful careers in clinical settings. And all have taken with them a greater awareness of and sensitivity to the concerns and issues of older adult patients. Still, the challenges are great, and we need to do more.

AFAR hopes that you will consider helping bring new, rising stars into the field of aging research and geriatric medicine through its MSTAR Program. AFAR relies on the generous and continuing contributions of individuals, corporations, foundations, and government agencies to make the MSTAR scholarships possible. Nurturing the talent and interests of medical students is critical to developing the next generation of researchers and leaders in the field and ensuring a high-quality pool of doctors to care for a growing population of older adults.

If you have any questions about making a donation, bequest, endowment, or gift through the MSTAR Partnership Fund, contact:

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