

Example of a Well-Written Research Proposal: Clinical Research Project

Please note: The following proposal was written by a student who was accepted into the research program for summer 2005. The format is slightly different than what is required for the summer 2006 application.

B. Description of Project

1. Title of Project:

Making Healthy Connections: Mentoring, Monitoring and Measurement

2. Description/Goals of Project:

- a. To assess the impact of a group and individual mentoring health promotion intervention on the health and quality of life of adolescents with intellectual and motor disabilities;
- b. Conduct a pilot study to assess the impact of an inpatient advocacy program (Here-to- Help) on the reduction of health disparities for hospitalized patients who cannot understand or express their health care needs and desires.

As a result of several serious medical errors in 2001 involving patients with intellectual disabilities, the BMC Chief Medical Officer, John Chessare, MD, MPH, called in a group of community advocacy agencies (e.g., the Massachusetts Arc), community organizations providing medical care to persons with cognitive disabilities (e.g., Shriver Clinical Services), and a number of BMC faculty with expertise in disability (e.g., Mary Cerreto, PhD, Chris Andry, PhD, Marc Emmerich, MD) to develop a set of safeguards for these patients. The inpatient advocacy program Here-to-Help (H2H) resulted from those meetings. Volunteers are recruited from the BMC Volunteer Office and are usually Harvard and BU medical students. At this point, it is important to investigate whether this program is achieving its primary objectives (see hypotheses below). Surgeon General David Satcher's final report, Closing the Gap: Health Disparities among People with Mental Retardation, stimulated a new awareness of the major discrepancies in health care and health outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities. The H2H program is the only program in the country that addresses this issue on an inpatient basis.

3. Hypothesis Being Tested:

I will be testing the hypothesis that an inpatient advocacy program will (1) reduce medical errors; (2) reduce the rate of rehospitalization; (3) increase patient (and community staff when appropriate) satisfaction; and (4) decrease health disparities among patients with intellectual disabilities hospitalized on the BMC wards compared to matched patients who did not participate.

4. My Role/What I Intend to Accomplish:

I will be the primary research assistant on the Here-to-Help project for this summer. While the entire research grant continues until September of this year, mine is a contained project within the research. I will interview patients participating in the Here-to-Help program and review chart data in order to obtain an assessment of the effectiveness of the program to date. I will record data, enter it into the community, and learn to complete simple statistical analyses. In addition, since at least some of good health care outcomes depends on information provided, I will work with Dr. Cerreto to develop health promotion materials appropriate to the literacy level of our patients.

5. Research Techniques I Will Learn:

- a. Development of a survey instrument for the collection of administrative data
- b. Retrieval of administrative/clinical data from medical records
- c. Interviewing research participants
- d. Phone survey of patients upon discharge e. Research design
- f. Data entry and simple data analyses
- g. Work with a cross-departmental research team
- h. Particular research protection and ethical concerns when research subjects have impaired intellectual abilities
- i. Development of a research poster presentation of my work

Instruction in research techniques will be ongoing throughout the summer with meetings one- on- one with Dr. Cerreto and in group meetings with her research team.

6. My Supervisor:

Mary C. Cerreto, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Associate Professor of Family Medicine

7. Status of Project:

My research is part of an ongoing project, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (9-30-03 through 9-29-06).