

Fellowship in Pharmaceutical Policy Research at Harvard Medical School and Harvard Pilgrim Health Care

PURPOSE

Escalating drug costs and the accelerated use of newer medications, particularly in the treatment of chronic conditions, have fueled legislation and private sector policies designed to control pharmaceutical costs and regulate medication use. Unfortunately, few of these policies are based on reliable research evidence of their effects on access to effective medications, quality of care, and cost.

The Harvard Medical School Fellowship in Pharmaceutical Policy Research (the Fellowship) seeks to address this gap between research evidence and policy by recruiting and training clinicians (e.g. MD, PharmD, RN, etc) researchers, PhD students, post-doctoral students, and mid-career university faculty through fellowships for excellence in pharmaceutical policy research. Led by faculty well known nationally and internationally for their expertise in pharmaceutical policy research and consultation, the Fellowship is the first medical-school based initiative in the country to train future leaders in research on impacts of drug policy decisions. Importantly, the Fellowship encourages dialogue among academic researchers and public policy leaders to share research findings relevant to health policy decision making.

Due to the location of the program in a large health maintenance organization (HMO) with researchable claims databases, special opportunities exist to study managed care pharmaceutical policies. Such opportunities may be of particular interest to those in charge of policy design implementation and evaluation in insurance programs.

OVERVIEW

This one to two-year fellowship accepts highly qualified candidates with an interest in national and international pharmaceutical policy. Faculty mentors work with fellows on their individual research and career development plans. Further, fellows may enroll in advanced methodological training courses at Harvard. Other program features include:

- Bi-weekly Pharmaceutical Policy Research [Seminars](#) at which fellows present their work to faculty and peers, and interact with leaders in many academic fields.
- Opportunities to present research results at scientific, clinical, and health policy conferences, and to work with faculty to publish work in leading journals.
- Interaction with government and private sector policy makers to promote the transfer of policy-relevant research findings.
- Funding via a stipend, work space, and access to library and computing facilities.

PROGRAM FOCUS

Currently, the Fellowship embraces four important health policy areas: Policy Evaluation, Ethics, Cost-Effectiveness, and Mental Health.

Policy Evaluation

Fellows are encouraged to evaluate institutional, state, national, or international policies designed to contain pharmaceutical costs, provide or extend drug coverage, or promote higher quality care, among many other issues.

- Relevant topics might include economic and clinical impacts of cost containment mechanisms such as tiered formularies, financial incentives, physician surveillance; effectiveness of methods to improve drug prescribing; or predictors and outcomes of under-use of effective medications. Studies on vulnerable populations such as the chronically ill elderly or those without insurance coverage are a particular focus.

Ethics

Attention to the ethics of resource allocation and rationing has to date focused on rare, high profile areas such as experimental treatments for cancer and HIV infection. The Fellowship seeks to expand such research to broader pharmaceutical issues.

- Potential ethics research areas include resource allocation; the distinction between “treatment” and “enhancement” as applied to pharmaceuticals; ethical issues in cost-effectiveness analysis; or

- examination of insurance policy terms such as “medical necessity” and “experimental.”

Cost-effectiveness

Information to assist clinical and policy decision-making by evaluating the economics of clinical alternatives is essential in an environment of rapidly rising healthcare costs.

- Fellows might choose to evaluate the cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit of specific drug interventions; estimate the economic impact of treating diseases with prescription drugs in managed care settings; or examine ways in which economic analysis can inform decision making for prescription drug coverage.

Mental Health

Contracting for mental health and substance abuse services with specialty companies has resulted in major challenges in balancing cost containment, care quality, and access to services, especially in managed care settings.

- Research opportunities include the effects of risk sharing for psychoactive drugs; coordination of medications for physical and mental health disorders across primary and specialty care sites; and identifying policy barriers and "accelerants" to the widespread need for depression or ADHD treatment.

SETTINGS

The Fellowship, guided by the Drug Policy Research Group, is based in the Department of Ambulatory Care and Prevention (DACP) in Boston’s medical area. The DACP is the first medical school-based department to link closely with a large health plan, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care (HPHC), and a large multi-specialty group practice, Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates. The DACP is a co-founder of the HMO Research Network, through which 14 leading U.S. HMOs undertake collaborative research involving millions of enrollees. The DACP maintains close ties with many academic and medical institutions, including the Harvard University PhD Program in Health Policy. These affiliations provide rare opportunities for DACP-

associated faculty and fellows to participate in the translation of their research into practice.

Harvard Drug Policy Research Group

For more than 20 years, the Drug Policy Research Group has published studies on pharmaceutical use and health outcomes in large populations; methods of improving clinical decision-making; and the effects of changes in medication reimbursement and cost-containment policies on the quality and outcomes of health care in the U.S., Europe, Canada, and developing countries. The group, a collaborating center of the World Health Organization, (<http://www.dacp.org/dprgwhocpp.html>), is recognized nationally and internationally. The core Fellowship faculty members have mentored dozens of fellows, many now well-established investigators, during the last decade. They also consult frequently on health policy issues for elected state, national, and international entities including the U.S. Congress.

FELLOWSHIP FACULTY

Jeanne M. Madden, PhD, Instructor. Dr. Madden's research is in the area of policy evaluation. At present she is directing a four-year study of the impact of the new Medicare Part D drug benefit on cost-related medication nonadherence. In addition, Dr. Madden is leading an investigation of the relationship between underuse of asthma controller medications and outcomes indicating uncontrolled asthma. She directed a comprehensive study to determine the effects on maternal and infant health outcomes, service utilization, and costs of two policies that, in succession, shortened and then lengthened standard hospital stays at childbirth. Ongoing research includes a related study involving post-cesarean lengths of stay and investigations into the detection and treatment of maternal depression. Dr. Madden also works in the area of international pharmaceuticals policy and methods for measuring medicine prices in low- and middle-income countries.

Dennis Ross-Degnan, ScD, Associate Professor and HPHC Director of Research. Dr. Ross-Degnan is a global leader in the design and implementation of programs to train researchers and improve the use of medications in developing countries. His research focuses on developing strategies for measuring appropriate use of medications,

evaluating the effects of pharmaceutical policies, and developing interventions to improve quality of care.

James E. Sabin, MD, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, Director of the HPHC Ethics Program, and Director of the Center for Ethics in Managed Care. Dr. Sabin has developed a nationally recognized, innovative organizational ethics program firmly based in a managed care system. His major research interests are in the clinical and theoretical aspects of fair resource allocation, and how values implicitly and explicitly enter clinical and programmatic decisions in ARV treatment programs.

Steven R. Simon, MD, MPH, Associate Professor. Dr. Simon is a general internist, medical educator, and health services researcher. His research focuses on the evaluation of innovative medical education and quality improvement programs. He has led or participated in research projects and teaching programs spanning all levels of medical education, with emphasis on practicing physicians.

Stephen B. Soumerai, ScD, Professor and Fellowship Co-Director. Dr. Soumerai is well known internationally for his published work on quality of care, physician behavior change, and the effects of drug coverage and cost-containment policies on access to effective medications, patient outcomes and the cost of care, especially among vulnerable populations.

Connie Mah Trinacty, PhD, Assistant Professor. Dr. Trinacty's research focuses on issues related to access and quality of care improvement among vulnerable chronically ill populations, particularly in the area of healthcare disparities among diabetes patients. In addition, Dr. Trinacty's research objectives include development, implementation, and evaluation of local and national strategies for addressing disparities in chronic health care delivery systems.

Catherine Vialle-Valentin, MD, MHCM, Research Associate
Dr. Vialle-Valentin is a Research Associate in the Department of Ambulatory Care and Prevention (DACP) at Harvard Medical School and Epidemiologist at Harvard Pilgrim Health Care. She received her medical degree in France where she is board certified in endocrinology. She holds a masters degree in health policy and management from the

Harvard School of Public Health. Dr. Vialle-Valentin's research is in the area of international pharmaceutical policy evaluation. She completed a study to evaluate the role of community-based health insurance plans on access to medicines in poor settings. At present, her work is centered on methods for measuring access to and rational use of medicines in developing countries. Her main research focus is the development and testing of a household survey collecting in-depth information on medicines used during acute and chronic conditions, and on medicines kept at home.

Anita K. Wagner, PharmD, MPH, DrPH, Assistant Professor and Fellowship Co-Director. Dr. Wagner's work focuses on the design and implementation of research and training programs to strengthen evidence-based medicines policies decision making in insurance programs in developing countries.

James F. Wharam, MB, BCh, BAO, MPH, Instructor. Dr. Wharam is a general internist and medical educator. His research interests include examining effects of health policy trends on patients, ethical components of health system reform, and international health ethics. Most recently, his research has centered on the impact of high deductible health plans on clinical utilization and ethical aspects of performance-based physician compensation.

Fang Zhang, PhD, Instructor. Dr Zhang is an applied statistician specializing in time series analyses, categorical data analysis and Bayesian hierarchical models. He provides biostatistical support in all phases of domestic and international health services and pharmaceutical policy research that evaluates the impact of health policies on access, quality, and outcomes of health care. He is also involved in post-marketing drug safety research.

[A list of past and current Fellows can be found here.](#)

How to Apply for the Pharmaceutical Policy Research Fellowship

Please click here for application guidelines
<http://www.dacp.org/dprgfellowship.html>

Contact for Further Information

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