

# Recovery & Rehabilitation



CENTER for  
PSYCHIATRIC  
REHABILITATION

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## Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Program at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation

The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health's Final Report states, "Systematic approaches to bring scientific discovery to service providers, consumers, and families must be emphasized more."

In the last thirty years, the field of psychiatric rehabilitation has undergone remarkable changes. The dedicated advocacy of practitioners, administrators, consumers, and policy makers have moved people-based values, techniques, and tools from the margin to the mainstream. From the beginning, establishing the psychiatric rehabilitation approach relied on input from a wide range of concerned individuals: consumers, researchers, clinicians, and family members. Developing the field with the input of these valued voices provides great rewards—but also requires that the field cultivate, educate, and train researchers with new specializations and new skills. In particular, an increased understanding of the principles and practices of psychiatric rehabilitation will inform research agenda to more effectively contribute to the recovery and well-being of persons with serious mental illnesses.

### Rehabilitation, Research, and Recovery

The Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation—with funding from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR)—created the Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in order to train researchers with clinical backgrounds in the field of psychiatric rehabilitation; the

program has been in existence for the past 17 years. With three Fellows in residence for two years each, the Fellowship emphasizes training through seminars, research practicum, and mentorship. During the course of their fellowship, the participants are expected to present research findings at professional conferences, contribute to the grant-proposal process, author publications in the field, and design and conduct an independent pilot study in the psychiatric rehabilitation field.

According to Dr. Sally Rogers, Director of Research at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, "The mission of our federal funding bodies is, in part, to have science work in service of our constituents and to bridge the 'science to service' divide. To do that in the most effective way, it is imperative that we have researchers who possess both clinical knowledge and the knowledge to construct meaningful and rigorous evaluations of psychiatric rehabilitation interventions."

### Bridging the Gap

One of the driving forces behind the Postdoctoral Research Fellowship is the desire to reconcile the "science to service" gap and the need for rigorous and innovative research. More researchers with a psychiatric rehabilitation sensibility means greater potential for the development and assessment of recovery-oriented interventions. This is of critical importance in an environment where

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evaluation often serves as a gateway to funding and the adoption of new practices. The combination of skills that the post-doctoral fellows have at the end of the fellowship period addresses precisely this need.

Maintaining a balance between the need to deliver tested interventions and the field's fundamentally experience-based approach is a challenge close to the heart of psychiatric rehabilitation. Funding and administrative approval for new interventions are frequently linked to rigorous evaluation. Therefore, training researchers is a necessary step to develop practices that are quickly adopted for widespread use.

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## The Fellows

If psychiatric rehabilitation is to truly succeed in mental health practice, the field needs to have more researchers trained to conduct rigorous and innovative research. In addition, researchers must have an appreciation of the field of psychiatric rehabilitation and an understanding of how interventions are actually provided. Current career paths do not routinely bring these experiences together in individual researchers. The Center's current Post-Doctoral Fellows are in the process of combining these experiences.



**Dr. Naira Matevosyan**

A native of Armenia and a physician, Dr. Naira Matevosyan, comes to the Center with a background in reproductive health. She has trained in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Sweden, and the United States, yet the vision and mission of CPR were new to her. "I am thrilled and honored to be a part of the research and training team at the

Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation. This fellowship is a watershed event in my career. Learning about recovery-oriented principles and interventions has changed so much of what I thought I knew about mental health issues." Dr. Matevosyan is conducting a pilot study on the reproductive health in women with serious mental illnesses that also examines the perspectives of mental health providers regarding the impact of reproductive health behaviors on the women's well-being and recovery process.



**Dr. Marie Mesidor**

Dr. Marie Mesidor is a clinical psychologist with experience conducting evaluations of federally funded health programs. She came to the Center to enhance her research skills in recovery-promoting mental health services and is currently conducting an exploratory study on the relationship between mothers with major depression and their adult daughters. "I hope this study will identify useful interventions that promote family recovery as both mothers and daughters age," she says. Dr. Mesidor is also conducting a mixed-methods study evaluating the effect of a laughter-based intervention on psychological functioning, stress, coping, and social support. "This study will help to identify how this nontraditional approach improves progress towards recovery among individuals with severe mental illnesses." Dr. Mesidor is also interested in the mental health of immigrant communities and is pursuing funding to study barriers and facilitators of mental health treatment for immigrants from Haiti, where she was born.



### **Dr. Galia Moran**

Dr. Galia Moran is an Israeli clinical psychologist and a family member who researched the critical ingredients in family therapy for depressed adolescents in her dissertation. Following her interest in serious mental illnesses, she taught a graduate course on psychiatric stigma that enhanced her interest in pursuing a post-doc research position with a focus on stigma and recovery in mental health. She explains that joining the Center was a perfect fit, “seeing that so many people in the Training and Research divisions are persons with lived experiences of mental illness shows the prospect of how far one can really recover. So it’s really great, very inspiring, and gives a lot of motivation.” Her research interests and projects involve exploring the impact of working as a peer provider to one’s own recovery, transforming mental health systems to be recovery-oriented and using improvisational playback theatre as a group experiential intervention that promotes wellness.

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## **Structure of the Fellowship Program**

Carrying out recovery-oriented mental health and rehabilitation research requires a cadre of researchers to be exposed to existing knowledge on recovery from serious mental illness and to be trained in the specificity and the challenges of conducting research within this innovative paradigm. The purpose of the advanced rehabilitation research training program in psychiatric rehabilitation and recovery is:

- To provide fellows with intensive state-of-the-art didactic experience as well as exposure to collegial collaboration relevant to psychiatric rehabilitation research.
- To provide fellows with a research practicum consisting of mentored participation in an ongoing project in psychiatric rehabilitation or recovery, development and implementation of an original pilot study and preparation of a grant submission and publications relevant to each fellow’s area of research interest.

The training program has been designed to develop and foster competencies in the following areas:

- psychiatric rehabilitation and recovery framework
- consumer advocacy and self-help
- research design/methodology
- statistics
- computer literacy
- conduct of applied rehabilitation research
- grant and professional writing

These competencies are enhanced through a variety of training modalities:

- didactic seminars in psychiatric rehabilitation and recovery, consumer advocacy and the self-help movement in mental health, research design, program evaluation, qualitative research methods, advanced methods of statistical analysis, data management, and models, principles and techniques of knowledge transfer.
- statistical software training
- training in the conduct of responsible research
- mentored research practicum
- mentored grant-writing and publication experience

In December of 2008, Center Fellow Dr. Galia Moran delivered the keynote speech at the Israeli Ministry of Health's annual mental health conference in Jerusalem. Dr. Moran spoke to an audience of over eight hundred providers, consumers, and family members about the problem of stigma as a major obstacle to promoting recovery and also took the opportunity to outline the Center and its mission to an enthusiastic response.

"Israel is a small and dynamic country and the Israeli mental health community is small as well; the field is ripe for new ideas to respond to and implement—it's very exciting to think about the transformational power of psychiatric rehabilitation in my home country."



- presentations at professional conferences
- independent study through Center and University symposia, tutorials, workshops, and self-directed study
- collegial exposure to other rehabilitation research scientists

While the fellowship is designed to provide a broad-based intensive training in psychiatric rehabilitation research, the fellows are guided to develop particular expertise in conducting recovery-oriented research through the ongoing mentorship provided by a seasoned researcher at the Center. Mentors offer fellows ongoing supervision, guidance, and support, and help them fine-tune their research interests and career goals. Mentors are also instrumental in helping fellows prepare conference presentations, grant proposals, and publications manuscripts and select appropriate avenues for both publishing and funding.

The fellowship is structured in 2-year training cycles with three fellows in residence during each cycle. This organization of the training program gives fellows the opportunity to develop close peer relationships and to cross-fertilize ideas among themselves in addition to the

structured training modalities and ongoing mentorship by Center staff.

The next training fellowship cycle will be starting in the spring of 2010; recruitment of new fellows will be advertised at the Center's website several months in advance. Individuals interested in this fellowship are encouraged to contact the program directors, Drs. Sally Rogers and Zlatka Russinova, via e-mail at [erogers@bu.edu](mailto:erogers@bu.edu) and [zlatka@bu.edu](mailto:zlatka@bu.edu) or telephone at 617-353-3549.

## Conclusion

Dr. Matevosyan, Dr. Mesidor, and Dr. Moran are each developing careers paths in which research in psychiatric rehabilitation is a key element. With the experience of programs like the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation's Postdoctoral Research Fellowship, professionals like these can undertake new efforts in psychiatric rehabilitation, and in many cases bring that knowledge to other parts of the world. Developing and supporting programs that bolster clinical experience in psychiatric rehabilitation with training in research will continue to strengthen the transformative impact of the field.



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