

Their Futures Depend on What You Do Today

Almost Home Kids (AHK), an affiliate of Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital enrolling the next cohort of fellows into the Scholars Program in Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics (DBP), Mental Health (MH) and Complex Care (CC) for Advanced Practice Registered Nurses.

Nationally there are more than 3 million children with special healthcare needs and growing at 5% annually, they are among the most rapidly growing subgroups of the pediatric population. In Illinois alone, there are currently 14,000 children who are medically complex. Advances in medicine and technology are allowing children who are medically complex to live longer lives which results in an increased need for supportive services from medical the community.

Parents and providers report that families face 9-12-month delays to see a subspecialist in Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics (DBP) for diagnosis and treatment interventions and the same is true for children and adolescents waiting to see a psychiatrist for mental health services. Mental Health care needs for children and adolescents have increased tremendously over the past year as they and their families deal with the pandemic and the many struggles and uncertainties it has caused families. Children with complex care needs are forced to be hospitalized longer than necessary, putting these children at higher risk for poor health outcomes due to limited availability of providers comfortable caring for them.

Recognizing the need to increase the core group of medical professionals competently trained to care for these children, AHK is providing a fellowship program with a goal of educating Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN's) in the subspecialties of Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics, Mental Health, and Complex Care. With advanced training, APRN's will be better able to diagnose, manage, co-manage, and refer as needed, children for developmental disabilities (including cerebral palsy, autism, and learning disabilities), medical complexities (including epilepsy, genetic abnormalities, neurological impairment, feeding and respiratory problems), and behavioral issues (including ADHD, anxiety, depression, and incontinence).

Here's What You Can Expect

The APRN scholar will participate in an intensive one-year, 50 week, two days, 15-20 hours per week, training program partnering with the University of Chicago's Fellowship Program in Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics, University of Illinois at Chicago's LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disorders), the Ohio State KySS (Keep Your Child Safe and Secure) online Mental Health Fellowship, ADOS-2 (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule 2nd Edition) training, Advocate Aurora Health Care including Illinois Masonic Developmental Center and Advocate Children's Hospital Oak Lawn and Park Ridge, DuPage Easter Seals, Erikson Institute, Anne & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital, Division of Specialized Care for Children (DSCC), and Shirley Ryan Ability Lab. Distance Learners will participate in all didactic courses, available Zoom clinical experiences, and will need to coordinate with local organizations to arrange additional clinical experiences, to be approved by program faculty.

Scholar Eligibility

A successful candidate for the Post Graduate Scholars Program in DBP, MH, and Complex Care must have a minimum of 2 years of primary care or acute care or 1-year outpatient DBP or primary care clinical practice, be licensed as a registered nurse and Advance Practice Nurse in their state of practice or received their APRN license by the time they begin the program.



"There is a silent crisis in the United States due to the extreme shortage of specialists who care for children with medical complexity (CMC) specifically, and Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics (DBP) in general. We are developing an innovative program to address this crucial workforce issue"

Peter J. Smith, MD, MA
Almost Home Kids Chief Medical Director



Career Benefits to Scholars

The DBP-APN Advanced Training Program provides the scholar with varied clinical and educational opportunities to prepare them for independent practice. Upon completing this program, APRNs will have the depth, breadth, volume, and intensity of foundational knowledge coupled with appropriate clinical experience to manage children with the conditions served by DBP clinicians and mental health providers. Graduates of this APRN Advanced Training Program will be well positioned to care for children with complex care needs.



Pre-COVID-19 Photo of APRN Scholars

APRN Scholars Program Curriculum

Scholars participate in case-based discussions and journal club. The scholars are provided opportunities for the following during the Advanced Training Program:

- understand the complex developmental processes of infants, children, adolescents and young adults, in the context of their families and communities
- understand the biological, psychological, and social influences on development in the emotional, social, motor, language, and cognitive domains
- understand the mechanisms for primary and secondary prevention of disorders in behavior and development
- analyze pathophysiology for various disease processes
- develop diagnoses, formulate treatment plans and evaluate patient response to treatment
- utilize evidence-based practices in delivering quality, cost-effective care
- educate patients and families about disease process and prevention
- develop organizational skills vital to effectively managing patient caseloads
- develop effective communication and presentation skills essential to work with an interdisciplinary team
- develop an age-appropriate treatment plan for mental health problems based on biopsychosocial theories, evidenced-based standards of care, and practice guidelines, including differential diagnosis for mental health problems.
- demonstrate behaviors that reflect a commitment to continuous professional development, ethical practice, an understanding and sensitivity to diversity and a responsible attitude toward patients, profession and society
- evaluate the relationships among access, cost, quality, and safety and their influence on health care
- demonstrate critical thinking and diagnostic reasoning skills in clinical decision making

Scholars receive a certificate of completion from Almost Home Kids as well as certifications for training in ADOS-2 Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule – Second Edition, KySS Mental Health Training Program, LEND Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities Program, and Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 0-5. **Scholars will not receive any compensation for participating** in this program and must be covered by an employer, or secure professional liability insurance with limits of at least \$1,000,000 per occurrence, \$3,000,000 aggregate to participate in clinical rotations locally at AHK, Shirley Ryan Ability Lab, Advocate Aurora sites (Christ Medical Center, Illinois Masonic Medical Center & Lutheran General), DuPage Easter Seals, DSCC, and Erikson Institute. **Applicants belonging to underrepresented groups are encouraged to apply.** AHK is committed to fostering and promoting a culture of diversity in the nursing workforce. We are inviting Top Talent from all communities to come join us! [Apply today!](#)

For more information about the program or to set up a meeting, please contact:

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Current Scholars



Betsy Becker MSN, CPNP, PHMS

"I joined the AHK Fellowship because it is my goal to become a trusted developmental/behavioral pediatric nurse practitioner who makes a significant difference in the vast majority of my patients' lives. I hope that I can better the quality of life for my patients and their families, ease some burdens, remove anxiety, and help kids be their best selves."



Stephanie R. Brancheau DNP, PNP

"This program has expanded my knowledge of available resources for families whose children have complex medical needs. I have strengthened my ability to facilitate care coordination and ensure that I am providing the highest level of quality care to my patients."



Vanessa Correia, APRN, CPNP-PC, CLC

"It's essential at this point to be able to provide quality mental health care to our patients. I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn from and with providers passionate about addressing complex pediatric needs and am already putting what we've learned to practice within my own FQHC community!"



Jennifer Hernandez, FNP-MSN AANP

"My goal for enrolling in the Scholars program is to use the tools learned and implement them in both urban and rural settings. I would love to help develop programs to implement particularly in rural areas."



Evelyn Hughes BSN, MSN, APRN-BC

"As a PPCNP working in Miami-Dade, I work with children who lack medical insurance or have complex care needs and are lacking a medical home. In this role I am required to provide medical care for children with both physical and developmental disabilities. By becoming part of AHK fellowship I hope to learn more about the Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics (DBP), complex care and mental health so that I can better serve my community. I am also looking forward to collaborating with other medical professionals who feel as passionate as I do about advocating for those who lack resources or aren't receiving all the services that they require."



Rhonda Heschel MS, MSN, RN, C-PNP. PMHS

"I am passionate about improving access to developmental and behavioral pediatrics and mental health care. The APRN Scholars program is a great fit for me. Through didactic and clinical education, I am gaining a depth of knowledge that will allow me to expand my skills and ensure that I provide the highest quality care for my patients. It's a fantastic opportunity!"



Megan Leser DNP, MSN, FNP-C

"I joined the APRN Scholars Program to increase my understanding and ability to care for individuals with developmental and behavioral differences. I see there is a large need to increase primary care providers' knowledge and skill in this area. I hope to one day have a practice that is accessible and comfortable for all."