

## **The US Veterans Affairs Quality Scholars (VAQS) Program**

The University of Toronto Centre for Quality Improvement and Patient Safety is currently accepting applications to begin a research fellowship in quality improvement through the US Veterans Affairs Quality Scholars (VAQS) program. Established in the late 1990s, the VAQS program is recognized as one of the most complete Quality Improvement (QI) training programs of its kind.

The program runs for **two years** and is designed to nurture fellows, junior faculty graduates in other healthcare disciplines and allow them to develop a career in research, in QI and health services, or in QI within the framework of a leadership position in medical administration, education, or clinical practice.

The VAQS program provides the unique opportunity to collaborate, network, and develop expertise from internationally-recognized leaders in the field of healthcare quality improvement. This program is intended for health care professionals in advanced stages of training or junior faculty who would like to pursue careers in quality improvement. Program design is a 'hub and spoke' model – with a program centre at Baylor University Medical School where faculty run the program and work in direct partnership with the VA Office of Academic Affiliations, which oversees all VA Special Fellowship Programs. There are eleven other sites (spokes) across the United States. Toronto is the twelfth and only non-American site for the VAQS program.

The first session is scheduled to begin July 10 2020.  
Applications must be received by May 15, 2020.

## **The 2-year VAQS fellowship is comprised of four components:**

1. Weekly half-day meetings Friday afternoons (1-3 PM EST), comprised of:
  - **1-2 PM: Local Toronto site session.** During the pandemic, will occur online via teleconference (e.g., Zoom); otherwise will occur at the downtown location of the Centre for Quality Improvement and Patient Safety (Hospital for Sick Children) at 525 University Avenue. Local curriculum involves guest speakers, small group presentations, and ongoing “work-in-progress” rounds to discuss QI projects.
  - **2-3 PM: Two-way interactive videoconference (TWIV) sessions with all VAQS fellowship sites.** Broadcast across each VAQS site, every site has fellows and academic clinicians participation in presentations with small group virtual “break-out” rooms. There are typically required readings and occasional local group work.
2. Mandatory Summer Institute (Conference) (August 10-August 14, 2020): This conference is a mandatory requirement that is ordinarily held in person in Houston, Texas. For this summer, given the pandemic travel restrictions, this conference will be entirely virtual. There is some preparatory work required and opportunity for international presentations.
3. Quality Improvement and Patient Safety Symposium, our local annual C-QuIPS conference held on October 6, 2020, in Toronto (most likely virtually – details TBD).
4. Project design and development. Fellows should build a portfolio of knowledge, skills and attitudes during their fellowship experience. Part of this 2-year experience is the design and implementation of a quality improvement project. The outcome of this work should be the development of competencies needed to promote the scholarship, research and practice of quality improvement. This may or may not include scholarly publication or local implementation of a quality improvement initiative.

**Expectations:** Fellows are expected to attend all classes and meetings, including the Summer Institute. Successful graduation is, in part, dependent upon a minimum of 75% attendance and participation. Fellows are strongly encouraged to submit scientific abstracts for presentation at any of the meetings they attend. Fellows are expected to present their initial plans of work (1st year) and work in progress (2nd year) at the Summer Institute and the Quality Improvement and Patient Safety Forum.

For more information, please visit the VAQS website at [www.vaqs.org](http://www.vaqs.org).

**Funding:** The cost for one year is \$3500. This will cover incidentals such as required textbooks, QI macros packages, speaker honoraria and videoconference fees. Unfortunately, this fee does not cover the travel, lodging, and registration costs for the mandatory conferences per year. Applicants are encouraged to find funding for travel activities through their clinical departments or other sources such as awards from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

**Application:** The Toronto site of the VAQS is now open to applicants from fields other than medicine; e.g., Department of Nursing or Department of Pharmacy. It is expected that applicants will maintain an active clinical role throughout the duration of the program. Attendance at the TWIV sessions is mandatory and protected time must be ensured prior to application submission.

Applicants must commit to a two-year cycle and attend all external meetings as well as a minimum of 75% of project meetings, videoconference and in-person sessions.

Interested applicants are asked to submit a CV, two letters of reference, and letter of intent including a brief project concept or proposal. One of the references must be from a Department Chair or equivalent in support of the candidate that explicitly states that the applicant will receive protected time from clinical duty for all 4 components of the curriculum. Space is limited to 3-5 fellows per year. There is a required interview process.

Interested individuals may contact Program Directors, Dr. Jessica Liu ([jessica.liu@uhn.ca](mailto:jessica.liu@uhn.ca)), Nely Amaral ([Nely.Amaral@sinaihealth.ca](mailto:Nely.Amaral@sinaihealth.ca)), or Dr. Chaim Bell ([Chaim.Bell@sinaihealth.ca](mailto:Chaim.Bell@sinaihealth.ca)).

**Please submit completed applications to:**

Ms. Lisha Lo ([lisha.lo@sickkids.ca](mailto:lisha.lo@sickkids.ca))

Research and Education Coordinator

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