

## The US Veterans Affairs Quality Scholars (VAQS) program

The University of Toronto Centre for Quality Improvement and Patient Safety (C-QuIPS) is currently accepting applications to begin a fellowship in quality improvement (QI) 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 QI training programs of its kind. It provides the unique opportunity to collaborate and network with and develop expertise from internationally recognized leaders in the field of healthcare QI.

### Target audience

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 QI and health services scholarship, or in QI within the framework of a leadership position in medical administration, education or clinical practice. 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 background

The VAQS program is designed as 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 nine other sites (spokes) across the United States. Toronto is the tenth and only non-American site for the VAQS program.

### Program format

The two-year VAQS fellowship is comprised of four components:

1. **Weekly half-day meetings Friday afternoons** (1-3 p.m. EST), comprised of:
  - a. **1-2 p.m.** local Toronto site session – During the pandemic, this will occur online via teleconference (e.g., Zoom); otherwise, it will occur at the downtown location of C-QuIPS (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.
  - b. **2-3 p.m.** two-way interactive videoconference (TWIV) sessions with all VAQS fellowship sites – Broadcast across each VAQS site, every site has fellows and academic clinicians participating in presentations with small group virtual breakout rooms. There are typically required readings and occasional local group work.
2. **Mandatory Summer Institute** (August 9-13, 2021) – This conference is a mandatory requirement that is ordinarily held in person in Houston, Texas. For this summer, given the pandemic travel restrictions, it 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 in October 2021 (virtual – details TBD).
4. **Project design and development** – Fellows should build a portfolio of knowledge, skills and attitudes during their fellowship experience. Part of this two-year experience is the design and implementation of a QI project. The outcome of this work should be the development of competencies needed to promote the scholarship, research and practice of QI. This may or may not include scholarly publication or local implementation of a QI initiative.

#### KEY DATES:

**May 15, 2021:** application deadline

**July 9, 2021:** first program session

### **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 (first year) and work in progress (second 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 \$3,500. 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 or 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 a 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 four 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))
- Dr. Chaim Bell ([Chaim.Bell@sinaihealth.ca](mailto:Chaim.Bell@sinaihealth.ca))

**Please submit completed applications to:**

Ms. Lisha Lo ([lisha.io@sickkids.ca](mailto:lisha.io@sickkids.ca)), Research and Education Coordinator, C-QuIPS