

The US Veterans Affairs Quality Scholars (VAQS) program

Overview

The University of Toronto Centre for Quality Improvement and Patient Safety (CQuIPS) 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, VAQS is celebrating its 25th year and 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.

The VAQS program is designed as a 'hub and spoke' model – with a coordinating center at the Houston Center for Innovations in Quality, Effectiveness, and Safety (IQuEst) at the Houston VA and Baylor College of Medicine. Faculty run the program and work in direct partnership with the VA Office of Academic Affiliations, which oversees all VA Advanced 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.

Who is VAQS for?

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 healthcare professionals in advanced stages of training or junior faculty who would like to pursue careers in QI.

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 mandatory conferences. 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.

Expectations

Fellows are expected to attend all classes and meetings, including the program's annual conference, 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.

Key dates

- **April 26, 2024**
Application deadline
- **July 12, 2024**
First program session

Interested individuals may contact VAQS program directors:

- Dr. Sonal Gandhi
(sonal.gandhi@sunnybrook.ca)
- Nely Amaral
(Nely.Amaral@sinaihealth.ca)
- Dr. Chaim Bell
(Chaim.Bell@sinaihealth.ca)

For more information,
visit www.vaqs.org

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:

- 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 CQulPS (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 p.m. – online sessions via teleconference (e.g., Zoom) 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 (virtual, August 12–16, 2024)

- Attendance at the annual conference is mandatory. There is some preparatory work required and opportunity for international presentations.

3

Quality Improvement and Patient Safety Symposium, our local CQulPS conference to be held in-person on November 19, 2024

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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.

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 videoconference 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.

Completed applications must be emailed to lisha.lo@sickkids.ca by April 26, 2024 and should include:

- CV (4 pages max)
- Letter of intent including a brief project concept/proposal
- Two reference letters (one 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 components of the curriculum)

Space is limited to 3–5 fellows per year. There is a required interview process.