

# Advanced Aging Research Training Seminar Series

at Harvard Medical School



## SUMMARY

### Target Audience

Postdoctoral research trainees supported by Division of Gerontology training grants or programs

### Purpose

To provide practical research training to postdoctoral research trainees conducting aging-related research

### Program

Monthly 90-minute seminars held between September and July that address various practical research topics with a focus on aging

### History

Thirty-one trainees have completed the program since it began in 2004

### Operating Costs

Participants' time, supported by their research training grants; faculty time (part of ongoing teaching responsibilities); administrative support, space, and equipment (provided by the medical center)

### Outcomes

88% of participants have rated the overall program as a valuable educational experience; eight out of nine T32 postdoctoral trainees, two of whom are MDs, have remained involved in geriatrics

### Available Materials

Seminar topics for 2006-07 and 2007-08; seminar evaluation forms and data

### For More Information

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## Program Overview

The Advanced Aging Research Training Seminar Series was created in 2004 as a way to bring together postdoctoral research trainees who are supported by Division of Gerontology training grants or programs. Their research interests span biological, physiological, and patient-oriented clinical research. These trainees include the T32 Translational Research Training Program awardees, research fellows in the Geriatric Medicine Fellowship Program, and those with Hartford Center of Excellence research training and faculty development positions.

Two common themes unite these trainees. First, they all have chosen to focus on aging research in their respective fields. Second, while they all have some research experience, they are still transitioning into independent investigators.

The main objectives of this program are to:

- provide practical research training to postdoctoral research trainees conducting aging-related research
- provide a venue for cross-fertilization of ideas among junior investigators conducting aging-related research in various disciplines.

## Program Operations

Each year, 10 to 14 trainees participate in the seminar series. In 2007-08, approximately six MDs and six PhDs were trainees. The 90-minute seminar sessions are held monthly between September and July, and address various practical research topics with a focus on aging. The format encourages small-group teaching methods with as much direct involvement of participants as possible. Some sessions are led entirely by the trainees.



The first session is devoted to a short slide presentation by each participant, to introduce their projects and goals for the year. The last session is devoted to a formal scientific abstract presentation by each participant and is also attended by senior research faculty and the trainees' mentors. The roster of topics repeats every second year after revisions are made according to the participants' feedback.

Because of the diversity of the participants' research interests as well as their levels of training, a concerted effort is made to provide a curriculum that includes perspectives pertinent to all participants. This is accomplished by including:

- topics that are generic to all levels and disciplines (e.g., qualities to seek in a mentor)
- faculty representation from both the clinical and basic sciences (e.g., regarding manuscript preparation)
- some sessions that are specifically designed to teach participants about the disciplines with which they are not familiar (e.g., "Basic Science for Dummies").

### **Staffing Requirements**

The seminar series program has two codirectors, both of whom are geriatricians and clinical researchers, members of the T32 steering committee, and Associate Professors of Medicine at Harvard Medical School.

One codirector is also a senior scientist at the Hebrew SeniorLife Institute for Aging Research and Associate Director for Research Training for the Geriatric Medicine Fellowship Program in the Division of Gerontology. This codirector's effort is supported by the geriatrics fellowship program.

The second codirector is Director of Research in the Division of General Medicine and Primary Care at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. His effort is funded through his roles as codirector of cores supporting research training in two program project grants—the Research Nursing Home through

Hebrew SeniorLife, and the Massachusetts Alzheimer's Disease Research Center. Trainees involved in both of these program projects have sent participants to the Advanced Aging Research Training Seminar Series program.

Additional teaching faculty are drawn from the senior research faculty in the Division of Gerontology, particularly those who serve as mentors to the participants in the various training programs.

A small administrative effort (i.e., communication, room assignment, audiovisual equipment), provided by Hebrew SeniorLife and the Beth Israel Deaconess Division of Gerontology, is required to organize the seminars.

### **Program Costs and Funding Sources**

The participants' time is supported by their research training grants (NIH Training Grant T32, geriatric fellowship program, Hartford Center of Excellence). Seminar facilitators consider their participation to be part of their commitment to teaching, and are not specifically compensated for their involvement. Administrative support, space, and equipment are provided by the medical center.

### **Process and Outcomes Data**

A formal evaluation process has been in place since the inception of the program.

Based on quantitative and qualitative evaluations, 88% of participants to date have rated the overall program as a valuable educational experience. Other features of the program have been similarly well rated, with somewhat more variation in the rating of the program content. Collated responses to the ratings of the individual seminar sessions from the 2005-06 and 2006-07 academic years also demonstrated very high levels of satisfaction.



Attendees sign in and complete an anonymous session-specific evaluation form at the end of each seminar. Data from these evaluations are used to track attendance, provide constructive feedback to the leaders of the seminar, and decide whether to retain each session as part of the next biannual curriculum.

A formal written evaluation of the overall program is also conducted at the end of the academic year. These evaluations are used to determine whether the overall program achieves the stated objectives. Evaluations are reviewed by the program codirectors and appropriate changes are made based on the feedback of participants.

Ongoing tracking of past participants helps determine their involvement in the field of geriatrics. All trainees from the T32, OAIC, and Hartford and Geriatric fellowships are tracked. Here is a sampling from the tracking of past postdoctoral trainees on the T32:

- Director of Clinical Neuropsychology, VA Boston Healthcare System;
- Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Boston University School of Medicine; Adjunct Instructor of Psychology, Harvard Medical School
- Research Affiliate, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Chief Science Officer, Moma Therapeutics (cell-based therapy for peripheral artery disease; wound healing)
- Instructor in Psychiatry
- Hebrew SeniorLife, Institute for Aging Research, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard Medical School
- Research Fellow in Medicine, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Harvard Medical School
- Assistant Professor of Medicine, Brown University; Active Staff Physician, Memorial Hospital of Rhode Island
- Senior Project Engineer, Stryker Development
- Research Fellow in Medicine, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Hebrew SeniorLife, Harvard Medical School

- Research Fellow in Medicine, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Hebrew SeniorLife, Harvard Medical School (ended his support on the T32 in August 2008).
- Research Fellow in Pathology, Harvard Medical School (will be ending his support on the T32 in October 2008).

### **Implementation Lessons**

- When a candidate is accepted into the program, it is made clear to the leaders of the participating training programs that attendance at the seminar sessions is a required component of the training experience. Along with the schedule for the year, a welcome letter, signed by the program codirectors and the training program director, is sent out over the summer, reiterating expectations of attendance and participation. Mentors are also informed of the seminar series schedule and are asked to release their trainees from any laboratory or clinical responsibilities during the sessions.
- Sessions are held at the end of the day (4:00-5:30pm) to minimize conflicts with other responsibilities, including formal classroom instruction.
- Faculty who conduct aging-related research are essential to the success of the program. Fortunately, many of the participating faculty members are also mentors for the seminar series participants, so they derive direct benefit from teaching the seminars.
- The every-other-year curriculum schedule minimizes the teaching burden for most participating faculty. Also, their time is considered part of the 50 hour/year noncompensated teaching commitment required of all Harvard Medical School faculty members. In general, there has been excellent faculty participation.



## **Available Materials**

### Tools/Resources

- Seminar series topics for the 2006-07 academic year
- Seminar series topics for the 2007-08 academic year
- Seminar series evaluation forms and data

## **For More Information**

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This document is part of a compilation of approaches to geriatrics recruitment, career development, and programmatic expansion, based on the work of the John A. Hartford Foundation "Centers of Excellence in Geriatric Medicine and Training." For more information, visit [www.afar.org/recruitment](http://www.afar.org/recruitment) or [www.jhartfound.org](http://www.jhartfound.org).

