

# Medical Student Four-Year Scholarly Concentration in Aging



at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University

## SUMMARY

### Target Audience

First-year medical students

### Purpose

To provide an opportunity to conduct a project that is scholarly and related to the broad field of aging. Students are expected to master clinical and clinically relevant basic science information on aging beyond the core curriculum.

### Program

A combination of self-directed learning, coursework, lecture, clinical experience, small-group discussion, and relationship with an “Elder Guide” supplement the centerpiece of the concentration – the scholarly project

### History

The Aging Concentration began in 2007

### Operating Costs

Program director, codirector, and project coordinator; student research and travel stipends

### Outcomes

Aging is the second most popular concentration; in the first year of the Aging Concentration, interest in the program exceeded the number of available slots

### Available Materials

Detailed program description

### For More Information

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## Program Overview

To prepare medical students for a variety of possible careers in geriatrics, the Scholarly Concentration in Aging (hereafter referred to as the “Aging Concentration”) addresses the broad areas of aging, encompassing the basic sciences, social sciences, community health, psychology, ethics, and medical education that are central to an understanding of health care and society.

Beginning in their second semester of medical school, first-year students can elect to participate in the Scholarly Concentration Program at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, in which they choose a broad thematic area in which to do a scholarly project over the following three years. The Aging Concentration, launched in 2007, is one of 12 content areas offered.

Students who select the Aging Concentration are expected to master (appropriate to the student level) a defined body of clinical information and clinically relevant basic science information on aging beyond that in the core medical school curriculum.

## Program Operations

Over their four years of medical school and under the guidance of a mentor, students design and implement a project that explores a particular clinical issue or health/public health area related to older adults and that results in a publishable paper, new curricular content, or an innovative pedagogical approach.



Students in the Aging Concentration will be able to demonstrate:

- mastery of geriatrics materials developed for the new integrated medical school curriculum, whether they have experienced the content in course-related work or not
- extensive knowledge of a particular aspect of aging, of a disease important in older patients, or of a geriatrics syndrome, and understand the social, clinical, epidemiological, and psychological consequences of the chosen topic
- extensive clinical experience in working with older patients in a variety of settings, including nursing home, assisted living facility, hospital, hospice, outpatient clinic, or office
- an appreciation of the experience of healthy aging, as well as a deeper understanding of the experience of living with chronic and multiple medical conditions often associated with aging.

Students will be expected to:

- undertake self-directed learning that deepens their knowledge of geriatrics beyond the core curriculum and relates to their final product/project
- choose and work closely with a faculty mentor for guidance in the pursuit of the concentration
- attend the summer lecture series on geriatric medicine and psychiatry (if they are in Providence for the summer following Year I)
- participate in an aging-related summer experience (e.g., Summer Research Assistantship)
- shadow a geriatrician
- meet at least twice each semester as a group with Aging Concentration directors and mentors to discuss important issues related to aging and complex cases (not-so-grand rounds) and to go on “field trips,” such as to an inpatient hospice site or Alzheimer’s daycare center
- establish and maintain an “elder guide” relationship with an older person from within the community with whom the

student spends a minimum of one evening or afternoon a month for three years.

The larger Scholarly Concentration program of the medical school actively promotes the Aging Concentration program during the first semester of the first year of medical school. Several evening information sessions are held, each highlighting three or four areas of concentration; the Aging Concentration directors attend the presentation to describe the program. In addition to these evening meetings, noontime individual scholarly concentrators give presentations about their ongoing work on their projects to all medical students and faculty. One Aging Concentration student has presented her work thus far.

### **Staffing Requirements**

The overall Scholarly Concentration program is managed by one medical school staff member. The Aging Concentration program is codirected by two faculty members (an assistant professor from the Geriatrics Division, and the Director of the Resource Center for Geriatrics Education), with assistance from a project coordinator in the Center for Gerontology.

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

Aging Concentration medical student participants are supported through various sources, including the NIA/AFAR/Hartford Medical Student Training in Aging Research (MSTAR) scholarships, American Medical Student Association scholarships, and the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation Aging and Quality of Life Program.

Faculty costs are supported by their appointing departments. The Reynolds grant supports infrastructure for the Aging Concentration and a small amount of faculty time. The grant also supports some of the medical school’s core infrastructure for the broad Scholarly Concentration Program.



## **Process and Outcomes Data**

Interest is growing, as the word spread in the program's opening year. In the first year the Aging Concentration has been offered, eleven first-year students have expressed interest in participating. Of these, six have been accepted and five are in discussion. Evaluation data of the medical school curriculum suggests that the extensive mandatory curriculum in geriatrics that medical students are now receiving has stimulated interest in the Aging Concentration.

Out of the 12 areas in which concentrators may focus, aging is the second most popular in the first year. This is significant, because a majority of these concentrators will eventually work in geriatrics, though most likely through specialties such as dermatology and surgery. Some, however, may accept a geriatric fellowship. This program is truly training future leaders in geriatrics.

The Aging Concentration has instituted student and program evaluations that will consist of the following components:

- At least twice a year, students complete a self-evaluation of individual progress and an evaluation of the program.
- Following the first summer, Aging Concentration students present their work to the program's Oversight Committee.
- The Oversight Committee meets 2-3 times each year to evaluate the students and the program.
- Students are evaluated by mentors.
- Geriatrics physicians and nurse practitioners evaluate students related to shadowing activities.
- Individual student conferences with Aging Concentration directors occur twice a year.
- Discussions are held once or twice a year with the students' Elder Guides to get feedback about the program and suggestions for improvement.

## **Implementation Lessons**

- A key to attracting new Aging Concentration students is to excite first-year medical students about the area of aging. Strategies that have yielded enthusiastic participants in the program include providing lectures and opportunities for small-group discussions in the medical school curriculum about the positive potential for healthy aging and the rich opportunities for exciting scholarship and curriculum in geriatrics.
- To enhance what the Geriatrics Division faculty can provide, Aging Concentration mentors are sought beyond the Gerontology Center.
- Aging Concentration students periodically shadow geriatrics nurse practitioners, in addition to geriatrics physicians, in various sites for this activity.

## **Available Materials**

### Website

- A detailed description of the program goals, learning objectives, activities, sample projects, evaluation processes, faculty, and funding sources can be found at:  
<http://bms.brown.edu/students/curriculum/concentrations/aging.html>

## **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).

