

# DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY

QUARTERLY REPORT

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University of Colorado **Anschutz Medical Campus**

# CLINICAL CARE

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## ALL ABOUT THE STEVEN A. COHEN MILITARY FAMILY CLINIC

The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus provides targeted, evidence-based outpatient mental health care to post-9/11 Veterans, Active Duty Service Members, and their Families. Veterans are eligible regardless of discharge status and family is defined broadly. The clinic accepts insurance through CU Medicine, and through our partnership with the Cohen Veterans Network, we provide some financial assistance to those without insurance or who cannot otherwise pay for care.

We pride ourselves on understanding the challenges faced and sacrifices made by military families, be it the stress of deployment, the requirement to move every few years, the adjustment to new schools and neighborhoods, and the adjustment to civilian life after discharge. All staff members undergo military cultural competence training, and most staff are Veterans or family members themselves. The Cohen Clinic providers specialize in treating depression, anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and other transitional challenges for patients across the lifespan. We also provide marriage counseling, relationship counseling, and help with children's behavioral issues to support the entire military family.

The clinic is located in Greenwood Village, and we see clients throughout the state via telehealth. Since its grand opening in spring of 2018, the Cohen Clinic has provided over 7,000 mental health services, with over 3,500 in the past year. Half of all clients served are Veterans, with female Veterans accounting for 20% of this group. That is nearly double the female Veteran population in the United States. Adult family members of Veterans or service members make up 34% of all clients served, while 14% of clients have been children or adolescents.

Kammy Bishop serves as Clinic Director. She is a licensed professional counselor, certified addiction counselor, certified clinical trauma provider, and a United States Marine Corps Veteran. Dr. Lynne Fenton, an Air Force Veteran, serves as Medical Director for the clinic. Dr. Matt Mishkind, an Air Force child and spouse, and former civilian with the Department of Defense, serves as Director of Operations.

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## **AN INTERVIEW WITH A VETERAN: DR. CHRIS THURSTONE ON CARE IN MILITARY SERVICE**

We are thrilled to welcome back Dr. Chris Thurstone, who recently returned from his 2nd tour of duty in the Middle East, where he serves as a military psychiatrist for active troops. Chris describes military psychiatry as meaningful through seeing patients improve. He also notes the difficulty of seeing a full caseload of soldiers - some whom have witnessed trauma civilians could not begin to comprehend. Chris was the only psychiatrist for our Middle East troops including Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. He was also, not surprisingly, the busiest clinician in his unit.

### **What is a day like in Kuwait serving in the Army reserves?**

His day begins at 5am with PT (or morning workout) followed by breakfast. By 7:30am, Chris moves to the inpatient unit, followed by intensive outpatient treatment in the afternoon. Hopefully done by about 6pm, he has time to eat dinner, call his family, and prepare to repeat the process all over again the next day. Chris mentioned the best thing about treating patients during his tours was not having to worry about copays, preauthorizations, or the number of pre-approved sessions, something many providers would certainly appreciate!

### **What do you think is the biggest casualty of war?**

Chris believes the biggest casualty in wartime is psychiatric wellbeing. While most people perceive the biggest casualty as physical injuries, such as gunshot wounds or loss of limbs, the mental health of soldiers is by far the most impacted. The list of common mental health issues include anxiety and PTSD related to trauma, depression, and homesickness due to long touring lengths and missing out on important life events such as the birth of a child.

One type of treatment Chris mentioned was combat stress control. CSC includes providing brief interventions, keeping the soldier on light duty with his or her jobs and unit to maintain their military identity and retain their built-in social support with meaning and purpose. Generally, people improve quickly which is a clinically helpful and personally gratifying experience for the care provider.



## DR. CHRIS THURSTONE, CONT.

Chris indicated that he treated over 300 patients in his almost 4 month deployment, and would be on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, harkening back to his internship days. He worked with a nurse practitioner and mental health specialists and together they provided many kinds of therapy and care to the soldiers.

### **Why join the Army Reserves?**

Chris found his calling to join the Army during the surge in 2008, when there was a lot of news about PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, and suicide in the Army. The Army at the time was accepting physicians with an age waiver, so Chris obtained his waiver and signed up. He is hoping to serve for another 10 years before retiring from the Army Reserve.

### **DEI In the Military**

Chris commented the military is the most diverse employer he has ever worked for. In addition to working with people of all ethnic backgrounds, approximately 6% of service members are foreign born. Politically, there are people of opposite political affiliations working effectively together because they have a common goal and mission.



DR. CHRIS  
THURSTONE

### **How Military Service Impacts the Entire Family**

When asked how his two deployments have impacted his family, Chris shared that during his first deployment his daughter fell behind in math, as he is her primary math tutor. For this most recent deployment, his son broke his tibia and fibula during a soccer match the day he left for his deployment. Fortunately, he had a chaplain for his roommate, who offered great support and comfort. Chris also shared that they say the most important person in the Army family is the military spouse who holds everything together. His wife and children are proud of him and their contribution, and we couldn't agree more.

# RESEARCH

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INSTITUTE SILVER  
AWARD WINNER

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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH  
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FUNDING



**BRAIN HEALTH** for all, for life.

## EVAN PLYS: MATHER INSTITUTE SILVER AWARD WINNER



DR. EVAN PLYS

This September, Evan Plys, PhD (Psychiatry), and Rachel Johnson PhD, LCSW (Nursing), received a 2021 Innovative Research on Aging - Silver Award. This award was granted from the Mather Institute, which is a national organization for research and resources about wellness, trends, and successful aging service innovations in senior living.

Evan and Rachel's winning work, a mixed-methods study conducted in 2020, investigated the potential impact of social hierarchies on assisted living community residents. Their study found that mental health, intimate staff-resident relationships, and extraversion were significant predictors of perceived social standing within an assisted living facility.

Evan and Rachel donated their Silver Award prize money, totaling \$1,000, toward the Social and Recreational Programs

Department at Senior Housing Options, which is a Denver-based organization that provides assisted living and affordable housing apartments to low- and moderate-income older adults with physical and mental challenges.

Evan Plys has worked in the Department of Psychiatry at CU Anschutz since September 2020. He is an Assistant Professor and Licensed Clinical Psychologist.

His research and clinical interests include quality of care and quality of life for older adults in residential care communities and psychological interventions for family caregivers of persons living with dementia. "I feel lucky to do this work... I mean who else can say that they get to learn from their elders and share a laugh during a highly-competitive trivia game as part of their research," said Plys. "But there is still a lot of work to be done to improve the quality, accessibility, and affordability of residential long-term care, that's the ultimate mission."

Evan is specialty-trained as a clinical geropsychologist and has additional expertise in psychological care with older adults in long-term, post-acute, and palliative care settings. He is now focusing on developing and testing novel and innovative psychological interventions to enhance coping and promote mental health among older adults, family care partners, and direct care staff in residential post-acute and long-term care facilities.



# BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE - CAPACITY TO ADDRESS ADVERSITY IN VULNERABLE PEDIATRIC POPULATIONS PROJECT FUNDING

Dr. Ayelet Talmi, PhD is a Professor in the Departments of Psychiatry and Pediatrics at the University of Colorado School of Medicine and a Licensed Clinical Psychologist. She serves as the Director of the Section of Integrated Behavioral Health in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division of the Department of Psychiatry, a Director of the Irving Harris Program in Child Development and Infant Mental Health, and the Director of Project CLIMB. Dr. Talmi has been with the University of Colorado since 2001 since she served as an intern in Colorado Children's Hospital Child Psychology Program.



DR. AYELET TALMI

More recently, Dr. Talmi has championed a project to build the Behavioral Health workforce - Capacity to address Adversity in vulnerable Pediatric Populations project, or BH-CAPP, to integrate behavioral health services into primary care and community settings. Dr. Talmi seeks to achieve this through the development, implementation, and evaluation to build a diverse, competent, and committed workforce with the capacity to address behavioral health, substance use/abuse, family and community violence, and psychosocial adversity in primary care and community clinics serving diverse, medically underserved pediatric populations.

To fund this important work, Dr. Talmi applied for and received a Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) grant totaling more than \$1.9 million over four years. Dr. Talmi has long been engaged in early childhood and integrated behavioral health systems building efforts, direct service, advocacy, and policy in Colorado and nationally. Her primary clinical and research interests focus on behavioral health service delivery systems for children and families, integrated behavioral health in primary care and community settings, early childhood mental health, and young children with special health care needs. Dr. Talmi is a Past President of the Colorado Association for Infant Mental Health and a Graduate Fellow of Zero To Three's Leaders for the 21st Century Fellowship.

With this grant, Dr. Talmi can continue her critical work of supporting child development through a comprehensive investment in the people and systems meant to help and protect kids.

# COMMUNITY

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CU-WELLBEING  
SUPPORT TOOL  
AND FACULTY &  
STAFF MENTAL  
HEALTH

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**BRAIN HEALTH** for all, for life.

## CU-WELLBEING SUPPORT TOOL AND FACULTY & STAFF MENTAL HEALTH

As the COVID-19 pandemic persisted throughout 2020, we recognized the need for additional assessments of mental health across our campus, and the ability to easily share referral information and support documents. In December of 2020, the Department of Psychiatry partnered with Adaptive Testing Technologies (ATT) to create an anonymous mental health screener for faculty, staff, students, and trainees on the CU Anschutz Medical Campus. ATT created software called the CAT-MH™ which is a suite of validated measures to assess the severity of many common mental health disorders with minimal time commitment from the participant.

Under the direction of Aileen Norton and Dr. Neill Epperson, the CU Wellbeing Tool was developed specifically for the CU Anschutz School of Medicine using the CAT-MH™ software for depression, anxiety, substance use disorder, PTSD, and adult ADHD. The tool is regularly sent to each department in the School of Medicine and data is then collected anonymously from faculty, staff, trainees, and students to assess their mental health and well-being. After filling out the survey, respondents receive an assessment score. They also receive resources specifically related to their score, including information about the Faculty and Staff Mental Health (FSMH) Clinic, built to serve our campus employees.

The FSMH Clinic was created in June 2020 as a collaboration between the Department of Psychiatry and the Chancellor's Office. The clinic serves the University of Colorado faculty and staff on the Anschutz Medical Campus and provides readily accessible mental health care for the very people who power our campus. The clinic began with two clinicians and has grown to include clinicians from psychiatry, psychology, and social work, as well as an advanced practice provider, and a licensed professional counselor. Since their inception, they have served over 2,500 unique patients.

Outreach efforts focus on promoting a campus culture that is more open and accepting of common mental health difficulties, thereby encouraging our Anschutz community to identify potential concerns and seek care earlier - before severe impairment. Prevention is also a focus as the clinic encourages individuals to practice self-care and healthy habits, as well as to look out for peers who may be struggling. For more information about FSMH, please visit our website at <https://medschool.cuanschutz.edu/psychiatry/programs/faculty-and-staff-mental-health>.



# EDUCATION

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FELLOWSHIP EXPANSION



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# 2021 PSYCHIATRY UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROGRAM AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE



EMMALY PERKS,  
MA, CCRP

This summer hosted the sixth cycle of the Psychiatry Undergraduate Research Program and Learning Experience (PURPLE). This 12-week, summer pipeline program was started in 2016 by Merlin Ariefdjohan, PhD, MPH. Throughout the program, applicants learn about the Department of Psychiatry's (DOPsych) research mission to promote "brain health for all, for life." PURPLE provides mentorship to undergraduate students through supervised research activities, clinical shadowing, and didactic sessions covering topics from basic research skills and scientific communication to professional branding.



LILY LUO, BS

PURPLE remains the only student mentorship program at the CU Anschutz Medical Campus that provides clinical research mentorship to undergraduate students, with a focus on mental health.

PURPLE intentionally seeks to attract diverse, accomplished students from a wide variety of cultural, geographic, and ethnic backgrounds and aims to help students become scientists and clinicians. Each year, approximately 60 applicants go through a rigorous selection process before 10-15% are invited to join the cohort.



## PURPLE - CONTINUED

Cohorts are intentionally kept small, as each student intern is paired with a faculty mentor to work on an original clinical research project during the program. Besides building a pipeline of future mental health professionals, the program also allows faculty mentors to develop their mentoring skills by sharing expertise and knowledge.

Under the current direction of Emmaly Perks, MA, CCRP, and with the assistance of PURPLE Program Coordinator Lily Luo, BS, the 2021 cycle hosted the largest cohort ever with nine bright and talented students hailing from across the nation to work with respective faculty mentors in the DOPsych. Universities represented included all CU campuses, Regis University, Metropolitan State University, Union College, and Stanford University. Although the program was held virtually this year due to COVID-19 restrictions, student-mentor dyads remained enthusiastic in completing their respective projects. These works were subsequently presented as oral and poster presentations at the PURPLE Symposium on August 13th.

In just six years, PURPLE has already increased the diversity of research and healthcare professionals in Colorado. Interns have come from rural and urban communities, are often first in their families to attend college, and have included DACA recipients, international students, refugees, multi-lingual students, and academic scholars (from other foundation programs such as Puksta, Boettcher, and Gates). In a recent survey sent to 27 PURPLE alumni (18 respondents; 67% response rate), more than half indicated that participation in the program had improved their research skills including data analysis, literature review, scientific thinking, and communication (including creating academic posters and public presentations). Additional benefits included improving a sense of teamwork, networking, and professionalism, which alumni noted to be highly applicable in their current career/academic pursuits.

Alumni also reported that PURPLE influenced their decision to pursue additional education and careers in healthcare; the majority of PURPLE alumni are now employed in various roles in healthcare settings, have matriculated to medical schools, or returned to CU Anschutz as research professionals. By supporting learners from all walks of life, PURPLE aligns closely with the department's DEI mission and in just 12 weeks, has a clear and lasting impact on the lives of students.

Truly, in DOPsych, it is well-known that “purple” is much more than just a color!



# PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT POST-GRADUATE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH FELLOWSHIP EXPANSION

To address the current behavioral health workforce shortage, Denver Health launched a Physician Assistant (PA) Post-graduate Fellowship in Behavioral Health in 2019. The goal of this program is to provide an intense, well-rounded, 12 months of clinical and didactic training to facilitate a successful career as a PA in behavioral health. Though PAs are medical professionals who can practice medicine with a delegated degree of autonomy under the supervision of a physician, they often have not had significant exposure to psychiatry in their PA school training. Clinical rotations in the fellowship include; Child and Adolescent Inpatient, Adult Inpatient, Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry, Addiction Consultation-Liaison, Psychiatric Emergency Services, Correctional Care, Outpatient Behavioral Health and SUD treatment.

Upon completion of this program, PA fellows will have the knowledge and skills necessary to make them successful practitioners of behavioral health in a variety of clinical settings, and will be prepared to apply for the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) Psychiatry Certificate of Added Qualification (CAQ). To our knowledge, there are only five such post-graduate training programs that currently exist in the United States. All seven graduates of this program

have obtained jobs in behavioral health prior to completion of this program, including a recent graduate now working at the University of Colorado Hospital.

In 2021, Program Director, Michelle Gaffaney PA-C and Medical Director, Kenneth Novoa M.D. were awarded a 5 year, \$2.1 million HRSA grant to support continuation and expansion of the PA fellowship. As part of this award, Denver Health and the University of Colorado Department of Psychiatry have collaborated to expand clinical rotations to the University with the creation of a new longitudinal outpatient clinical rotation. This rotation will provide PA fellows an opportunity to learn long-term medication management and brief therapeutic techniques over the full 12-month training program. Debra Davis, PMHNP-BC, has played a key role as the University of Colorado Clinical Site Director and continues to work with University faculty to develop clinical sites on the Anschutz campus. The first PA fellow started his longitudinal outpatient clinical rotation with Dr. Heather Murray in the Psychiatric Consultation for the Medically Complex (PCMC) clinic in September 2021. Future goals of the PA fellowship include increasing capacity from 4 to 6 fellows per academic year, obtaining Accreditation Review Commission (ARC)-PA Postgraduate Accreditation, and transitioning to an Advance Practice Provider (APP) fellowship to include NPs in the training program.



## Department of Psychiatry

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS**



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