

At the APA convention

15 public sector psychologists to get tuition-free RXP training

By Paula E. Hartman-Stein, Ph.D.

NEW ORLEANS – During the APA convention Division 18, Psychologists in Public Service, celebrated a partnership with the California School of Professional Psychology (CSPP) at Alliant International University to provide training in psychopharmacology free of charge for their members.

According to Division 18 President Kathy Harowski, Ph.D., St. Paul, Minn., the program will admit 15 students in October with 90 psychologists waiting for the training. “This is a total grassroots effort,” she said, “with highly committed students waiting since 2004.”

Randy Taylor, Ph.D., former president of Division 18, said the idea for the program began in 1998 after the board asked members how they could make division membership more attractive.

“We heard back that real continuing education, defined as that which improves practice capabilities was what our membership wanted,” said Taylor. “As a result of this program police and public safety

officers, veterans, native Americans, patients in community and state hospitals and in corrections departments will get the highest quality mental health care from highly trained specialists.”

Taylor said that Division 18 had developed an open and competitive process to identify an educational partner who would seek and manage funds to pay for the tuition of 100 public sector psychologists. The Division 18 board selected the CSPP program at Alliant for this demonstration project.

According to Steve Tulkln, Ph.D., director of the Postdoctoral Clinical Psychopharmacology Program at CSPP, in order to obtain the psychopharmacology training tuition-free, with only travel and room and board costs, the applicant must work with underserved populations consistent with the mission of CSPP. Between 60 and 70 private sector psychologists also are enrolled in the program for the individual tuition cost of \$11,800. The Cherokee Nation has committed funds to pay for two of their psychologists.

Following guidelines established by the APA the curriculum includes 450 hours of instruction with classes offered every third weekend for 28 months and will lead to a postdoctoral Master of Science in Psychopharmacology degree. The credential includes supervised practice and preparation for a national exam.

Despite the fact that psychologists have prescription privileges in only two states, New Mexico and Louisiana, Tulkln believes that institutions and primary care physicians throughout the country will see significant benefits when psychologists can provide a full range of clinical services including advising on psychopharmacology treatment.

Wayne Herrer, Ph.D., a program administrator for the Department of Corrections in Kentucky, who is awaiting the training, predicts exponential benefits within the corrections system. For example, he said in Kentucky there are three psychiatrists managing 2,000 to 4,000 inmates who receive out-patient services. “The psychopharmacology initiative can potentially save tax dollars because of increased alerts for side effects, better understanding of indications and contraindications for medications.”

Arthur Aaronson, Psy.D., Dayton, Ohio, believes the training for psychologists in psychopharmacology can benefit the treatment of returning soldiers from the war in Iraq. “The Veterans’ Administration, like other publicly fund-

ed programs, has considerable variability in their resources. In some Veteran’s hospitals psychiatrists are prescribing medication in groups and that can result in poorer quality care than the 10-minute medication check.”

Funding for the program began from a \$25,000 grant from the Tauber Family Foundation with the expectation that matching funds would be raised, but “the matching funds are currently in limbo,” said Tulkln. The program’s budget is \$1.2 million over 5 years.

Geoffrey Cox, Ph.D., president of Alliant University, has confidence the program will continue and flourish. “The university will show our support in any way possible for this program because psychopharmacology training is the next wave of our history of innovation.”

Paula Hartman-Stein, Ph.D., is a consultant and clinician specializing in work with older adults in Ken. Ohio. At the convention, Hartman-Stein received the Alfred M. Wellner, Ph.D., Senior Career Psychology Award from the National Register, which recognizes excellence among psychologists with more than 10 years postdoctoral experience. She can be reached through her website, www.centerforhealthyaging.com and email: pha@en.com