

**California Department of State Hospitals-Atascadero  
Atascadero, California**

**MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK  
INTERNSHIP PROGRAM**

**Informational Brochure**

**This brochure is also available at:**

<http://www.dsh.ca.gov/Atascadero/Internships/SocialWorkerInternship.asp>

**DEPARTMENT OF STATE HOSPITALS-ATASCADERO  
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK INTERNSHIP PROGRAM**

**I. GENERAL SUMMARY**

The California Department of State Hospitals-Atascadero (DSH-A) offers graduate students in Social Work a competency-based internship opportunity. The internship program is a challenging, stimulating, and growth-oriented experience which provides the intern with a practical complement to the university education. It is designed to support the intern in developing a framework of thought that allows exploration and understanding of clinical syndromes and treatment modalities. This includes: practicing assessment, designing and evaluating treatment plans, providing psychoeducational groups, educating and assisting families, and collaborating in planning patient discharges. Additionally, internships at DSH-A provide first-hand learning opportunities with forensic knowledge, as well as the operations of a state agency structure.

**II. AGENCY OVERVIEW**

DSH-A opened in 1954 and is a completely self-contained psychiatric hospital constructed within a security perimeter. Located on California's Central Coast, midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, the hospital is an all-male, maximum security, forensic, psychiatric facility that specializes in the treatment of adult, mentally ill males committed from across the state. DSH-A is fully accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations.

The hospital receives patients committed by the Courts and the Department of Corrections & Rehabilitations (CDCR). The hospital has a licensed capacity for 1,275 beds. The hospital's facilities include 34 housing units, a gymnasium, arts and crafts workshop, graphic arts center, Board of Parole Hearing rooms, mock trial facilities, staff-patient canteen, school area, computer center, music center, psychological testing center, video production center, training center, patient library, professional library, and fitness center.

The hospital employs approximately 1,920 employees in clinical, administrative and support categories. Clinical staff members with whom interns will work alongside include Physicians, Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Nurses, Dieticians, Rehabilitation Therapists and Psychiatric Technicians.

### **III. AGENCY MISSION**

The mission statement of DSH-A includes providing evaluation and treatment in a safe and responsible manner, seeking innovation and excellence in hospital operations, across a continuum of care and settings.

### **IV. AGENCY GOALS**

#### *A Safe Environment:*

In emphasizing public safety, DSH-A provides a secure environment within which patients can recover from the effects of their psychiatric conditions. This secure environment protects the community, as well as the people within the hospital, and enables and supports the therapeutic milieu.

#### *Responsible Stewardship:*

The hospital promotes individual responsibility and accountability. Employees and patients are empowered to identify problems, propose recommendations, and implement solutions.

#### *Excellence in Forensic Evaluation:*

DSH-A provides consumer-specific objective evaluations and recommendations to the courts and other agencies using the most up-to-date instruments and risk assessment models.

#### *Excellence in Treatment:*

The hospital provides up-to-date treatment and rehabilitation services to patients and ensures that community standards of practice and care are provided in our facility. Also, the hospital recognizes that recovery is most effectively achieved when services are person-oriented, empirically-based, and arise out of a diverse theoretical and multidisciplinary foundation.

### **V. AGENCY VALUES**

**Safety**

**Treatment**

**Responsibility**

## VI. DEMOGRAPHICS

The hospital's average working census is approximately 1000 male patients. The current patient population consists largely of:

*Mentally Disordered Offenders (MDO):* Patients who are paroled to DSH-A by authority of the Board of Parole Hearings are admitted under the provisions of PC 2962 or PC 2972. The MDO patient has completed his prison sentence and is sent to DSH-A to receive psychiatric treatment as a special condition of parole. Once criteria are met, MDO patients may be released to state parole supervision, placed in their county's Conditional Release Program, or within local county facilities.

Other patient commitments to the hospital include:

*Mentally Ill Inmates:* The hospital provides mental health services to inmates from the CDCR, under PC 2684. Criteria for admission under this program include a patient being diagnosed in the prison setting with an active Axis I major mental disorder. The focus of treatment is to stabilize symptoms so that the inmate/patient can function successfully and safely in the Enhanced Outpatient Program at CDCR and/or in the community.

*Incompetent to Stand Trial:* The hospital provides treatment and education services to patients admitted under PC 1370, Incompetent to Stand Trial. These patients receive specialized programming targeted specifically at helping them gain the knowledge and skills necessary to return to court as competent to understand court proceedings and effectively participate in their defense.

*Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity (NGRI):* Patients admitted under PC 1026, as NGRI, have usually been found not guilty by reason of insanity at the time the crime was committed. Once criteria are met, NGRI patients may be released from the hospital and placed into in their county's Conditional Release Program.

The cultural diversity of the patient population includes representatives from Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Native American, Filipino, Vietnamese, Thai, Indian, Korean, Laotian, Cambodia, Chinese, Japanese and other Asiatic groups. Patients are provided treatment services in their preferred language, when possible, which includes services in Spanish, Chinese, Farsi, Vietnamese, Russian, Tagalog, French, Hmong, Portuguese, American Sign Language to name a few. Reflecting the variety of backgrounds and needs, religious worship and spiritual services are provided to patients who identify as Protestant, Catholic, Baptist, Muslim, Jehovah's Witness, Jewish, Buddhism, Christian Science, Mormon, Pentecostal, Hindu, as well as various Native American faiths and other denominations.

## VII. TREATMENT

DSH-A utilizes a psychosocial, patient-centered, and strengths-based approach to assessment, treatment, and discharge planning of patients. The agency provides individualized active recovery services that focus on maximizing the functioning of persons with psychiatric disabilities; to endeavor to identify, support, and build upon each recovering patient's strengths to achieve his maximum potential toward attaining his hopes, dreams, and life goals.

The hospital is organized into five residential programs consisting of several treatment units each. Programs and units are generally structured around providing treatment to patients of particular commitment categories. Although subject to change, the focus of treatment for each program is organized as follows:

- ◆ Program I Incompetent to Stand Trial
  - ◆ Program III Mentally Disordered Offender
  - ◆ Program V Mentally Ill Inmate
  - ◆ Program VI Mentally Disordered Offender, Acute Medical, Enhanced Treatment
  - ◆ Program VII Mentally Disordered Offender
- \*all programs may have patients committed under Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity

The residential treatment programs provide a variety of individual, group, and unit-wide skills training, as well as rehabilitative and enrichment activities. These activities are prescribed by the patient's treatment team according to the patient's identified interests and assessed needs. Rehabilitation programs provide patients with the opportunity to learn an increasing number of vocational and work skills under the direction of trained vocational counselors and a variety of school-based classes where patients can improve academic achievement, receive a GED, or pursue advanced independent studies. A number of specialized programs and services exist to address the broad range of patient needs. Some of those include:

- ◆ Neuropsychological Assessment and Consultation
- ◆ Psychology Assessment Center
- ◆ Specialized Spanish Bilingual Units
- ◆ Enhanced Treatment Unit
- ◆ Medical Unit
- ◆ Music Center
- ◆ Aztec School
- ◆ Community Center
- ◆ Substance Abuse Treatment and Education
- ◆ Vocational Development Services

A patient's treatment team consists of an interdisciplinary membership, including at least the patient, treating Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Rehabilitation Therapist, Social Worker,

Registered Nurse, and Psychiatric Technician Sponsor. Additional treatment team members may include the patient's family, guardian, advocates, and attorneys as appropriate. Based on the patient's needs, additional members may also include but are not limited to: Dietitian, Pharmacist, Teacher, Physical Therapist, Speech-Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, Vocational Services Staff, and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner.

## VIII. SOCIAL WORK INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

### A. Program Overview

The program's mission is to train interns to function as complete professionals who can function effectively in a variety of job settings. The training includes working with ethical issues, working within an interdisciplinary team, coordinating community resources, working within bureaucracies, and advocating for issues related to the field of Social Work. This mission does not preclude an individual Social Worker's use of their own theoretical orientation, but rather provides a general framework that considers the patient as a total being, and is useful in integrating treatment efforts.

The primary emphasis of the internship program is on clinical training. Interns are encouraged to think critically and apply appropriate assessment and treatment methods. An intern's clinical training and experience is supported by training and supervision. Experiences within the internship program are designed to assist in achieving the goal of educational and professional competency by the end of the training year.

#### **Expected Core Competencies:**

In alignment with NASW "*Standards for Social Work Case Management*," it is expected that by the end of the training year interns will develop various levels of proficiency in many, if not most, of the following competency areas:

- ◆ Ethics & Legal Considerations
- ◆ Knowledge: Forensic Assessment & Treatment Interventions
- ◆ Cultural & Linguistic Competence
- ◆ Interdisciplinary and Inter-Organizational Collaboration
- ◆ Professional Development & Competency
- ◆ Service Planning, Implementation & Monitoring
- ◆ Professional Conduct: Record Keeping
- ◆ Practice Evaluation & Improvement
- ◆ Advocacy & Leadership

## Experiences by which interns develop competency include:

- Case Management/Casework
- Individual meetings with patients
- Psychosocial assessment and treatment planning of culturally and ethnically diverse patient groups
- Objective writing and outcome evaluation
- Psychoeducational group co-facilitation
- Forensic education/training
- Family assessment and education
- Discharge planning/facilitating
- Community resource coordination
- Journal article readings
- Trainings and seminars
- Participation in unit staff member meetings and shift changes
- Attendance and participation in Social Work Department Meetings
- Collaborating with within a multidisciplinary team with culturally/individually diverse colleagues
- Professional consultation
- Participation in individual clinical supervision
- Internship program evaluation

### B. Program Resources

- ◆ Staff: The hospital employs approximately 27 Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) from which intern supervisors and mentors are drawn. The entire Social Work body consists of 44 Social Workers, who have a variety of experience backgrounds prior to employment and many years of experience to offer to interns.
- ◆ Equipment: Office space, intern computers, the hospital's professional library, and other necessary resources are provided for interns commensurate with the resources provided to staff Social Workers.

### C. Processes

The mission of the program is accomplished in the following ways:

- ◆ Clinical training: Training experiences are provided via
  - A rotation on an admission unit which focuses on psychosocial assessment of mentally ill forensic patients
  - A rotation on a treatment unit which focuses on treatment planning, evaluation of outcomes, and discharge planning/facilitating.
  - Co-facilitation of one psychoeducational group

- ◆ Supervision: A minimum of one hour, face-to-face weekly meetings with the DSH-A Social Work Internship Supervisor, who is a LCSW and licensed for more than one year.
- ◆ Professional development: Beyond training and experience in assessment, treatment, and discharge planning, the Social Work Department will make available membership to the Social Work Department's professional committees.

#### **D. Intern Activities**

Beyond the requisite period of orientation, interns can expect to gain experience meeting patients and conducting assessments, planning treatment goals, and documenting progress. Also, interns will provide direct treatment in a co-facilitated psycho educational group, conduct discharge planning/facilitating, and participate in professional training and supervision as well as in program evaluation. The training program is structured, but will be tailored to the identified needs of the individual intern, depending on the level and type of prior experience.

##### **Orientation**

The first three weeks of training are set aside for orientation to the hospital; including first-aid, Therapeutic Strategy Interventions, forensic commitment codes of patients, rules governing documentation, clinical treatment concepts, and administrative directives. During this time, the intern will be meeting other hospital Social Workers, becoming acquainted with ancillary programs, and establishing learning goals for the year.

##### **Rotations**

Interns will complete a rotation on an admissions unit, where they will be involved primarily in conducting psychosocial assessments on newly admitted patients to the facility. Interns then participate in a rotation on selected treatment units, during which the intern will participate in treatment planning, psychoeducational group provision, family education, discharge planning/facilitation.

The rotation of unit assignment will be determined by the educational and experiential needs and preferences of the intern in conjunction with the needs of the Social Work Department and the hospital. While placed on a unit, the intern will be provided support from the assigned unit Social Worker. These Social Workers, will act as preceptors and support the intern in negotiating the documentation requirements as well as providing consultation in dealing with procedural or clinical issues. Throughout rotations, the intern will be designated a modified caseload of the assigned unit Social Worker. The intern will be provided the opportunity, within supervised guidelines, to function as much as possible (and when appropriate) as an independent practitioner on an interdisciplinary team.

## **IX. APPLICATION AND SELECTION**

### **A. Admission Criteria**

Social Work internships are offered to MSW students currently enrolled in and in good standing with a CSWE accredited education program. Prior to the commencement of an internship at DSH-A, students must have successfully completed at least one previous year of internship placement, or have an equivalent period of forensic mental health experience. Before being placed, interns must successfully complete/pass the required security clearance, health screening, and drug screening.

### **B. Application and Intern Selection**

DSH-A seeks Social Work interns with diverse backgrounds of interests, education, and training, to gain experience in a forensic mental health agency. The hospital is an equal opportunity employer.

Social Work students considering applying to DSH-A for internship are encouraged to discuss with their university field internship coordinator their interest. The university field internship coordinator should make contact with the Supervising Social Worker of Professional Education at DSH-A to: establish a current contact between agencies (if no current contract exists), to facilitate contact between the intern candidate and the Supervising Social Worker to assist in coordinating a scheduled in-person interview.

The application and interviews of intern candidates must be completed by May 1<sup>st</sup> prior to the commencement of a Fall internship.

## **X. CONTACT INFORMATION**

For further information please contact:

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