WellSpan Philhaven Hospital Psychology Internship Program: COVID-19 Information and Program Modifications

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, modifications to clinical work were enforced by our State and by the WellSpan Health system in order to reduce the risk of staff infection. Outpatient mental health services provided by psychology interns transitioned to remote (video or telephone) services, and day hospitals also transitioned to all-remote services. However, because therapists for patients on our psychiatric inpatient units were considered essential, some in-person inpatient services were provided continuously by interns. These included psychotherapy with hospitalized patients and some limited psychological testing. Most weeks interns only provided inpatient services about 2-3 hours and were able to work from home the rest of the time. It should be noted that our psychiatric hospital did not treat COVID-19 patients, and all staff were screened before entering the hospital building. Masks have been provided and required, and social distancing enforced wherever possible. Additionally, all internship supervisions and seminars were provided via Zoom, with no in-person meetings conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (which is still the case at the time of this brochure update in early July).

We were able to provide essentially the same program, including three rotations for General Track interns, ongoing outpatient experiences, etc., during the pandemic. The only internship experience that was restricted was the group therapy experience at the Plain Communities Clinic (2 hours per week for one intern) related to this program continuing in-person services throughout the pandemic. The overall volume of direct services provided by interns reduced for some interns during the height of the pandemic, but our program was able to involve interns in other projects associated with the COVID-19 emergency, such as staffing our WellSpan employee support call line and participating on various committees and work groups involved in providing behavioral health support to employees, patients and families most impacted by COVID-19.

The organization has policies and procedures for employees who have been exposed to or suspect they may have COVID-19. In this case, the employee calls WellSpan Employee Health and Safety. The Employee Health and Safety nurse conducts a screening and then determines whether COVID-19 testing is recommended. If so, the employee is referred for testing. In the event of a COVID-19 infection, employees are restricted from work until 1) they are free of fever for 72 hours and 2) 14 days from the onset of the symptoms.
The organization plans to begin a process of opening up for in-person mental health services in our outpatient offices, likely a phased reopening starting sometime in July. Other programs will also begin plans for reopening, following guidelines from the WellSpan organization and assuming we don’t have a resurgence of COVID-19 requiring extended safety measures for staff and patients.

In the event that the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to impact our WellSpan Philhaven clinicians including psychology interns, or if other unanticipated factors should impact our training setting, we want to be clear that we will do everything possible to continue quality internship training in a manner that provides a safe environment for interns.

For 2020-21 interns, it is likely that you could be providing psychotherapy both in-person and via telemedicine (video visits). This relates to our reliance on remote services during the COVID-19 pandemic but also reflects the likelihood that many clients will prefer at least some degree of telemedicine services even when risks are reduced. We will be enhancing our 2020-21 training program by adding training in telepsychology. Additionally, please note it is possible that some aspects of your orientation could be conducted remotely as well. We will provide these details in communications regarding your orientation.

For 2021-22 candidates, please note in the Internship Application Process section that this year’s interview process will be conducted remotely. Those offered interviews will be given instructions explaining how to participate in interviews by video (such as via Zoom).