



Advancing Excellence in Pharmacy

Keep Posted

[Past Digital Issues](#) [Article Submission Guidelines](#) [Career Center](#)



## ***Chicago State University Summer Research Internship with Northwestern University***

[Print This Article](#)

College Connection

by Jessica Ortiz, P-3

The summer before my third year of pharmacy school, I completed a pre-doctoral research fellowship offered through Northwestern University's Clinical and Translational Sciences program. Upon acceptance, I was granted the ability to "shop" around for a mentor. I chose to work alongside Dr. Robert Garofalo, a pediatrician and Director of the Center for Gender, Sexuality and HIV Prevention (the Center) at Ann & Robert Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. The summer internship allowed me to work with a research team that specializes in the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS as well as other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

I have always been interested in the management of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and preventative medicine, and I knew the research Dr. Garofalo conducted would be the perfect fit for me. After learning more about Dr. Garofalo's background through an interview published by the Chicago Tribune in April 2014, I became inspired by his story. The article discusses how he became a national advocate for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and an advocate for HIV prevention. Dr. Garofalo took it upon himself to make a difference and motivate people to destigmatize HIV. He started a non-profit organization named after his yorkie, called "Fred Says", which raises money to provide care and treatment for patients living with HIV and for those at risk of being infected. Working under him has influenced me to educate and encourage others to promote awareness.

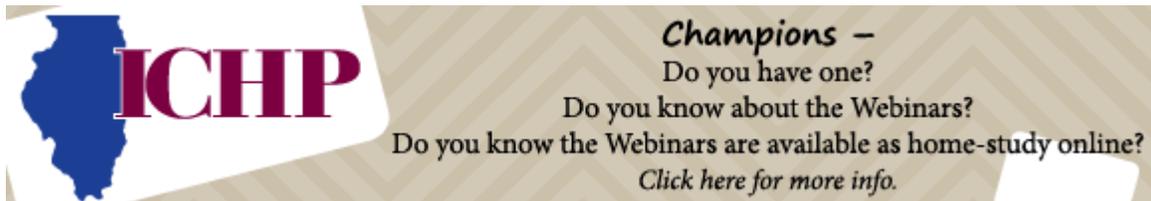
Working at the Center was an eye-opening experience. I realized the importance of advocating for a population that endures judgement, social stigma, and neglect. On site, I assisted with the HIV and STI testing team as well as a few of the research studies. I received certification training through both the Chicago Department of Public Health and Alere Diagnostics. This training was important because it taught me how to counsel patients and about point-of-care HIV testing. On the testing team, I administered HIV tests and testing materials for self-collected STI tests, screened patients for their eligibility to enroll in research studies, conducted surveys and assisted with counseling sessions. If an individual's results were positive, I was to notify them and link them to care for a confirmatory diagnosis as well as provide resources for the patient to receive treatment. Additionally, I would follow up with them after a few weeks to ensure they were receiving adequate care.

Of course, being a pharmacy student, I became interested in a research project related to medication adherence and was able to assist with an intervention study called Positive STEPS (Strategies to Enhance Problem-solving

Skills). The study was designed to test the efficacy of stepped-care in antiretroviral therapy adherence in HIV positive adolescents. The first step/intervention of the study implements a text message reminder aimed to have the participant take the HIV medication as prescribed. It isn't until the text message reminder intervention fails that a more intensive intervention occurs (five, 50 minute face-to-face counseling sessions) to address adherence barriers. During my 10-week experience, I helped record participant data and aided the on-site counselor to prepare for the counseling sessions. The study had just completed the enrollment phase, and I didn't assist a great deal during this process. However, I definitely plan to work with the investigators next summer.

Despite the fact that the tests offered were free of charge, a huge challenge for the facility is encouraging patients to actually get tested. People often attach shame to getting tested. At the Center, we educated the public not only on the importance of finding out one's status, but also supporting those who contracted the disease. One of the most valuable lessons I learned is the importance of promoting awareness on HIV and STI care. Being a pharmacy student, I had the opportunity to speak with patients and my peers to promote awareness and educate others on overcoming stigmas.

The management of patients with HIV/AIDS is complex, but the advances in modern treatment have been nothing short of amazing. Pharmacists are needed more now than ever before to assist with managing complicated medication regimens. Advocating for improved awareness, reduced stigmatization, and human justice is extremely important, and I am very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to meet the amazing staff at Lurie's Hospital and to have been able to educate myself and others on promoting awareness.



© 2017 ICHP. All Rights Reserved.

[Home](#) | [About](#) | [Contact](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Advertising](#)