

Q&A With Joanna Lackner, Mental Health Occupational Therapy Fellow

Joanna Lackner, OTR/L

- Undergraduate school: University of Minnesota, bachelor's in psychology
- Graduate school: Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, master's in occupational therapy
- Hometown: Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Fellowship: [mental health occupational therapy fellowship](#), 2018



Why did you decide to pursue an occupational therapy fellowship in mental health?

I have always felt that mental health is key in one's overall ability to achieve a state of wellness. After completing my schooling, I felt the need to continue my professional development in the area of mental health. When researching fellowship programs, I felt they were well-structured to fill the gaps in my knowledge and practice about occupational therapy's detailed role in mental health.

Why did you choose the fellowship program at Johns Hopkins?

This well-designed fellowship focuses on mentorship and excellence in evidence-based practice. The program provides a diverse collection of educational experiences, including opportunities to attend didactic lectures within the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, advocate to further our profession at the state and national levels, and receive personalized mentorship throughout each of the eight service line rotations.

What were your general responsibilities as a fellow?

As the mental health occupational therapy fellow, my responsibilities included a combination of patient care, research and other scholarly activities such as advocacy and teaching. In addition to these responsibilities, I was able to attend a variety of didactic courses focused on psychiatric conditions and occupational therapy practice.

What was your caseload like, and what kind of patient populations did you work with?

My caseload usually ranged from about eight to 12 patients who I saw on an individual basis and some in groups. My patient population evolved as I rotated through each of the psychiatric service lines, including general stay, motivated behaviors, schizophrenia, affective disorders, eating disorders, geriatrics, chronic pain, and child and adolescent.

Name one important thing you've learned from your mentors in the program.

Throughout this program, I was fortunate to work with a variety of mentors. Each of them has offered guidance and direction regarding treatment interventions, group dynamics and evaluation measures. They challenged me to expand my knowledge while respecting and fostering my skill set to provide advanced clinical practice.

Were there activities outside of work that helped you make friends and maintain work-life balance?

There is ample chance for you to connect with other fellows outside of work, including attending happy hours, local events or work get-togethers. The mentors are very attentive to ensuring you maintain a healthy work-life balance.

How has this fellowship helped you grow professionally so far?

The program has vastly improved my skills in mental health occupational therapy, as I now feel prepared to evaluate and treat a wide variety of patients. The program highlights evidence-based, outcome-focused, holistic occupational therapy to ensure you are providing the best care.

Any advice you would give to someone interested in this fellowship?

If you have a passion for psychiatric occupational therapy and would like to broaden your skills, I would encourage you to apply. The experience and knowledge you gain throughout the yearlong fellowship are well worth the effort.