

# Q&A With Kristen Martin, Acute Speech-Language Pathology Fellow

## Kristen Martin, M.A., CCC-SLP

- **Undergraduate school:** The University of Maine, Orono; B.A. in communication sciences and disorders with a minor in disability studies
- **Graduate school:** The University of North Carolina at Greensboro; M.A. in speech-language pathology
- **Hometown:** Morrill, Maine
- **Fellowship completion year:** [Acute speech-language pathology fellowship](#), 2018



## Why did you decide to pursue a speech-language pathology fellowship in acute care?

I believe it is important to diagnose and treat cognitive-communication impairments and dysphagia early on during critical illness. Speech-language pathologists have the opportunity to facilitate communication, which is important not only for improving quality of life, but also enables patients to be active participants in their care.

## Why did you choose the fellowship program at Johns Hopkins?

The fellowship program at Johns Hopkins is unique in that it provides a broad range of experiences and mentorship. After completing two acute care placements in graduate school, I wanted a fellowship that supported further didactic experiences, mentorship and research opportunities. In addition to all the learning opportunities, the staff at Johns Hopkins was so welcoming, kind and supportive, I knew it would be a community that would foster personal and professional growth.

## What were your general responsibilities as a speech-language pathology fellow?

Fellows are responsible for balancing patient care, didactics, research and mentorship sessions. Mentorship sessions consisted of reviewing and discussing case studies and research articles as applied to patient care. Didactic experiences included attending and contributing to medical rounds and observing surgeries, procedures and other providers. Additionally, fellows attend presentations and present to providers and therapists.

During my fellowship, I also had the opportunity to work on two IRB-approved prospective research studies and complete my own “passion projects” or quality initiatives.

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

During my 13 months as a fellow, I had the opportunity to work on all the services at the hospital, including acute inpatient rehabilitation, neurology/neurosurgery, medicine, general surgery, cardiovascular surgery, thoracic surgery and oncology.

I worked with patients at all levels of care and provided a variety of services. On a typical day, I may have provided alternative means of communication to a patient intubated in the ICU and then provided intensive dysphagia treatment to a patient on the floor.

In addition to the variety of medical complexity, I also worked with patients from a variety of backgrounds. I think The Johns Hopkins Hospital provides a unique health care environment, being both a community hospital for people in Baltimore and surrounding areas and an international destination for patients from all over the world who come to get the best treatment for their unique conditions.

## Name one (or several) important things you've learned from your mentors in the program.

I have learned more than I can even fathom this past year to name just one thing! My mentors passed on not just speech therapy wisdom, but nuggets of wisdom that I have applied to my personal life. My mentors have encouraged and modeled maintaining a work-life balance, continued learning/curiosity and advocating for patient-centered care.

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

Johns Hopkins has several fellowship and residency programs for speech-language pathologists, physical therapists and occupational therapists. After our monthly journal club, my therapy cohort went to happy hour. Being in an intensive program, it is easy to make friends with people who “get it.” We supported each other through the stress, fun and success! It was wonderful to be part of an interdisciplinary group of individuals. I also became involved in a local church community early on after I moved to Baltimore, which helped me become more active in my community, have support and maintain a work-life balance.

## How has this program helped you grow professionally so far?

This program has provided me the opportunity to attend and present at several conferences, as well as write for the *ASHA Leader*. The acute care therapy leadership supports additional experiences and professional development.

I learned and gained so much experience during this program. It is a lot of work, but I would do it again.

## What advice would you give to someone interested in this program?

Apply — this is a great program! Some things you can do in graduate school to help you decide if the program is a good fit for you:

- Complete multiple acute care placements.
- Get involved in research, even if it is just completing literature reviews or having ideas for research studies.
- Present your research findings at a conference, placement or even to your grad school cohort.