



New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome
AND ASSOCIATED DISORDERS

*Collaborative Partnerships
for the Tourette Syndrome Community*

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TOURETTE SYNDROME AWARENESS MONTH: TS practicum program at Rutgers helping families

PISCATAWAY – One of the biggest problems associated with treating Tourette Syndrome is that too few psychologists, mental health professionals and other healthcare practitioners know enough about TS to help the individuals and families dealing with the neurological disorder.

The New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome & Associated Disorders (NJCTS) Clinic and Practicum Program at Rutgers University's Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP) was created more than a decade ago to help close that gap and give those individuals and families a place where they not only could seek treatment, but also feel reassured that the clinicians administering the treatment have a strong knowledge base.

For the past seven years, the clinical director of the program has been Dr. Lori Rockmore, a psychologist with expertise in child development, impulse control disorders, parent training and social and emotional learning. She works extensively with both parents and children, and consults with school districts from pre-school through high school.

“We specialize in treating individuals and families with TS and their co-morbid conditions, using habit reversal techniques to help the tics and cognitive behavioral treatment to deal with the OCD, ADHD, anxiety and trichotillomania (the pulling out of one's hair),” Rockmore said. “We are hoping to turn the treatment over to the families, so we teach them skills of how to manage the behaviors at home. Sometimes you just need to change the way you parent or the way you interact around a kid in treatment.”

Rockmore's team consists of six graduate students in the practicum and two post-doctoral fellows, one who sees up to 10 clients per week and another who specializes in research and is working on expanding the reach of the practicum program. Each week, the graduate students take part in 90 minutes of didactic education, undergo one hour of supervision and tackle the cases of 5-8 clients.

It's quite a heavy workload, but according to Dan Braman – a graduate student who came to Rutgers last year and was placed in the TS practicum – it's a great opportunity to acquire the skills training to work with clients and gain valuable knowledge through other, more everyday clinical experiences.

“I’ve learned a lot of new ways to work with clients,” said Braman, who has worked closely with Dr. Shawn Ewbank, the assistant director of the program. “I find it interesting to meet the clients where they’re at. If there’s an 8-year-old that wants to work with puppets, we can do that. If there’s an adolescent that wants to talk about basketball and video games, we can do that, too.”

Braman and Rockmore say they both enjoy watching the habit reversal technique at work because it’s not like a pill that is taken once and then the symptoms go away. It’s part of a process that gives children and adults a way to cope with their tics and skills to react to them in a way that makes them more manageable.

Rockmore makes it very clear, however, that the people in her program are “not the ones who invented the treatment, we are the people who are trained to do the treatment.” To help make that process even smoother for her clients, Rockmore – utilizing NJCTS’ extensive member database – has sent out a needs-assessment survey to the entire New Jersey Tourette Syndrome community. This summer, the results of that survey will be tabulated and used to help revamp the program so that it can deliver even better services to those in need.

Atara Hiller, who has been a part of the TS practicum for the past two years, believes families already are receiving excellent treatment, and her experience from the very beginning has been nothing but positive.

“It’s been a great training experience. The families I’ve worked with are genuinely committed to doing what they need to do to help their kids,” Hiller said. “As challenging as it can be to handle all the different problems associated with Tourette Syndrome at once, when you are able to see progress, it’s a very rewarding thing.”

To schedule an appointment with the TS Clinic, please call 848-445-6111, ext. 40150. Assessments usually require 2-5 sessions, each of which are approximately 1 hour long. Once an assessment is complete, Rockmore and her team of clinicians develop a treatment plan in collaboration with the parents to best meet the goals set forth in the assessment. Treatment is then offered on a sliding scale based on family income. For more information, please visit www.njcts.org.

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