

Wanted: Child Psychiatrists

Fellowship provides in-depth training to fill the region's gap in services

South of Springfield, you can count the number of child psychiatrists on one hand.

The SIU School of Medicine fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry aims to help fill this void in the School's service area of central and southern Illinois.

Child psychiatrists need special skills to treat the complexities of children's mental health issues, which include working with families and social systems. Interpersonal skills and the ability to be a good educator are among the particular qualities of child psychiatrists. "They have to have the ability to think in systems and see the big picture," notes Fellowship Director Ayame Takahashi, M.D. "That can mean talking with the school system to get a teacher to understand the special needs of the child."

Fellowship training is the final part of sub-specialty physician training, and most fellows settle down near where they've done their fellowship. "With this fellowship, we hope that over time

the rural and underserved areas of central and southern Illinois will get more child psychiatrists."

Most child psychiatry fellowships in the nation (Dr. Takahashi estimates that there are about 120) are set in major metropolitan areas. A native of the Midwest, Dr. Takahashi worked for a decade in New York and realized that specialized programs available in large urban areas aren't offered in this area. She jumped at the chance to start a new fellowship program at SIU School of Medicine.

Nadeem Mazhar, M.D., the first child psychiatry fellow, is integrating the fellowship with SIU's general psychiatry residency program. He began the fellowship in January 2008. Two more fellows are slated to begin the two-year program next July.

The SIU fellowship is a comprehensive training program that includes six months seeing patients at the Lincoln Prairie Behavioral Health Center. Fellows also treat outpatients, gaining expertise in

psychotherapy and medication management in children. They learn about the school system and gain experience in pediatric neurology, too. Some unique features of the fellowship include rotations in telepsychiatry and rotations to observe normal child behaviors in day care, elementary and high school settings.

"Early intervention and the significant difference it can make drew me to the field," Dr. Mazhar says. He's especially interested in substance abuse treatment programs, which, he says, give great insight into real problems facing adolescents, some of whom are court-ordered to get counseling. "Some of their social problems and medical problems have never been picked up or treated before," he explains.

Dr. Mazhar calls the SIU faculty and staff "competent, accessible and helpful." He plans to stay in central Illinois to practice child psychiatry. ●●●