

Delaney Mendoza

Final Journal:

My practicum took place under Dr. Courtney Rieck, PsyD, at Greenville Memorial Hospital's pediatric HemOnc unit. I shadowed her for the majority of my time, but also was able to observe with Dr. Maria McDaniel, PsyD, for more neurocognitive aspects of care for the patients in the unit. Overall, I loved my experience, and would recommend time and again for anyone interested in pediatric psychology, especially as it relates to medical conditions.

My biggest goal for this practicum was to figure out if the path of clinical psychology was one that I would enjoy. Up until taking theories of psychotherapy, I had always thought that, while I love psychology, the actual practice of therapy was not for me, and I would enjoy research and academia more. After theories, I wasn't quite sure, so I found a practicum in the area I thought would be most akin to the type of clinical career that I would want, to see if my mind would change. I found that it did change, at least a little. I really enjoyed the clinical setting, and it made my soul happy to see behavioral health integrated into the routine care for the patients there. While I didn't get to facilitate any sessions or appointments, I was able to observe a plethora of different areas of my supervisor's position, including intake sessions, regular sessions, inpatient and outpatient consult, as well as yearly check-ins with survivors. I was also able to observe some things with the neuropsychologist, such as cognitive testing, intake and feedback sessions. In relation to the cognitive testing, the concepts being studied and the methods being used to do so were extremely fascinating to me, however I found myself extremely bored during the testing itself. Therefore, I do not think that kind of position would be right for me. The practicum helped me reach my goal of deciding whether I like clinical psych or not, and I definitely do, but it is not the sole thing I would like to do in the future. In speaking with my supervisor, I was able to find out that many hospital positions (so long as they are a university affiliated one) have research opportunities available for their doctors, and some

even require it, meaning that it would be possible for me to bridge the gap between my two passions, and not have to choose one or the other.

As a result of this practicum, I was affirmed in my desire to attend school for my PhD or PsyD, but it has made me rethink what programs I am looking into. I know now that I would like to attend a clinical psychology program, ideally with the opportunity to choose a specialization field of pediatrics or developmental psychology. I plan to apply to those programs in the fall of '24, hopefully to start in the fall of '25.

I learned a lot as a result of this practicum, but one of the biggest takeaways was learning how to read and write reports. I had plenty of practice with my supervisor writing reports of the sessions I observed in the Data-Assessment-Plan and Subjective-Objective-Assessment-Plan formats, and I feel that this experience will be very useful to me down the road. I did not get to directly interact with any patients, only observe, but through time with my supervisor carefully reviewing these sessions, I was able to ask questions, and get feedback on my particular thought processes and what came up for me while I was observing. Dr. Rieck utilizes the cognitive behavioral therapy model, which we spoke about at length, and I was also able to learn about some manualized therapies that she employs, such as the Coping Cat.

I definitely think that I would want to work in a similar environment in the future, I loved being a part of the patients' whole team of care, as well as the community that the hospital unit gave. I enjoyed the way that the entirety of Dr. Rieck's job was not only therapy sessions, it added variety that I would most definitely enjoy, though if I did get a position at a hospital, I would desire there to be a research component too.

I changed over the course of the experience in many slight ways, the largest of which I would say would be my knowledge of the service population. I went in knowing nothing about psychology related to chronic illness like those that the patients in the unit were experiencing or the psychosocial effects that treatment for these illnesses may have on them. The effects on chemotherapy and radiation vary by drug, dosage, and location, and all this plays into the patient's cognition, function and mood both during and for years after

treatment. Due to this, psychological testing and treatment play a big role in their care. I am still far from knowing all about it, but I definitely picked up on a lot. Another thing that I was encouraged to change in was my confidence in asking questions and asking for guidance when I wasn't sure about something. By the end of my hours, I felt confident that my questions and thoughts were valuable, so I was more inclined to speak up and ask or attempt to answer things even if I was not sure. This was empowering, and though I did not get to employ the things I learned with patients directly, I feel like I improved in how I would have.

My relationship with my supervisor, Dr. Rieck, was really amazing. She has a passion for teaching/mentoring, as well as a passion for her job that was palpable, so it was clear that she was doing everything she could to help me get the most out of my experience. She helped me answer questions I did not even know to ask and took time to explain things about her career path and schooling in order to give me some guidance with mine. Dr. Rieck was encouraging of my pursuit of knowledge, and never made me feel bad for not knowing the answer to something. She worked with me to make sure I was seeing all aspects of her position that I wanted to, as well as other positions on the team, such as neurocognitive testing with Dr. McDaniel, and a little of the more medical side with the nurse practitioner. Dr. Rieck's manner with patients is definitely something I would hope to emulate someday, as she was really great at speaking at a level the patient and their family would understand without seeming condescending or lacking genuineness. She is great at rapport building, so that was another wonderful thing to observe.

The conditions at the site were pretty ideal, I was able to shadow either Dr. Rieck or Dr. McDaniel directly the entire time across all locations that are under the care of their team. I also got to witness the functioning of the unit in other regards, such as a team meeting, and cheering on a kiddo as he rang the bell to signal that he had graduated from treatment. I felt welcome at the site, and everyone made sure I was informed, even if it meant a little extra explanation of certain things.

My knowledge of different mental and cognitive disorders and their symptomology, primarily learning difficulties, adhd, anxiety and depression were really relevant to my practicum experience, as we had many patients that were being seen for intake, or expressed concern related to these issues that required referral and/or follow up. Though I was not the one doing these things, I was able to note where I would say something and what I would say, and Dr. Rieck would ask me what my assessments would be after a patient's presenting symptomology. I also found that my in-class knowledge of CBT was very helpful, because it allowed me to understand, without much explanation, what Dr. Rieck was doing in sessions with patients.

During my experience, I was not so much surprised by anything so much as I was just soaking up as much knowledge as I possibly could from a new situation. The one thing that did surprise me, however, was just how much the idea of how symptomology is affecting one's daily life is incorporated into assessment. For example, if symptomology points to attention issues such as adhd, there might not be anything done, or a diagnosis made, if the patient does not express that it is abnormal to them or having effects in their daily functioning. I did not run into any value based or ethical dilemmas at my site.

Overall, I learned a lot and had a wonderful experience at my practicum site and would love to return for a practicum or fellowship during/after graduate school.