

General Internal Medicine Fellowship: Creating Leaders in GIM

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Upon completion of residency, internal medicine graduates face a diverse array of career paths. Some choose to start practicing medicine immediately as primary care physicians or hospitalists. Others choose to pursue fellowship training in a medical subspecialty. A lesser-known option is the general internal medicine (GIM) fellowship.

What exactly is a GIM fellowship, and what does it add beyond residency training? The GIM fellowship is designed to provide expertise in content areas such as medical education, health policy, quality of care, and research in public health and health systems design. Fellowships can be tailored to meet individual interests, and specific tracks for research, quality improvement, and medical education may be offered. Many fellowship programs also incorporate a master's degree program in one of these areas of specialization.

GIM fellowships provide the knowledge, foundation, and skills necessary for success in academic GIM and for leadership roles in medical administration and health policy. Although most residents are encouraged to participate in research or quality improvement projects during residency, most residency programs do not provide formal training in study design or biostatistics. With the common "learn-as-you-go" approach, residents are often left with many knowledge gaps in designing and conducting sound research. Similarly, during residency there is little formal training in adult learning theory and best practices in medical

education, health policy, quality improvement, or redesign of clinical systems of care. Furthermore, most residents are ill equipped to analyze results from medical research and have little training in scientific writing. These skills are key elements in the education of GIM fellows and position them to lead in academic and administrative careers.

GIM fellowships achieve this goal through several mechanisms. First, as briefly mentioned, the GIM fellowship often provides content expertise through formal master's-level degree programs in public health, health sciences (including clinical epidemiology), or education. Fellows acquire the methodological skill set needed for a career in research or medical education. Second, fellowships provide close structured mentorship in the trainee's area of interest. This usually involves a panel of mentors who provide invaluable guidance and counseling with respect to research projects, work-life balance, and career development. Lastly, throughout the fellowship years, fellows participate in outpatient clinics and/or rotate through inpatient or consult services as both clinicians and educators.

Awareness and interest in GIM fellowship are growing among internal medicine graduates; the programs, however, are few, and the application process remains decentralized. To facilitate access to information about individual GIM fellowship programs, SGIM has begun to compile a list of GIM fel-

lowship programs accessible online at <http://www.sgim.org/career-center/training-directories>. This includes links to the specific fellowship-sponsoring institutions. At this time, each institution has its own application process. Application deadlines also vary, ranging from February to September of the year prior to starting the program.

If you are interested in subjects that augment and enhance clinical care for patients—including health services research, public health, health policy, quality improvement, health care administration, or medical education—you should consider a GIM fellowship. Graduates of GIM fellowships pursue interesting and diverse careers, which can evolve along many different paths. A week in the life of a GIM professor may include a half day precepting in clinic, a day providing direct patient care, a half day participating on a health system quality improvement team, a few hours leading sessions like resident morning report and journal club, and the remaining time working on process improvement projects in inpatient or ambulatory care. GIM "specialists" are often sought after for leadership roles both within and outside the health care system. GIM graduates are now leading large research centers, health care systems, and public health agencies. If you want to become one of our nation's next leaders and innovators in medical education, health policy, or public health, the GIM fellowship is right for you.