

## MEDICAL EDUCATION

## The National Clinician Scholars Program: Continuing the Legacy of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholars Program

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**The report of my death was an exaggeration.**

—Mark Twain  
New York Journal, 1897

Many were surprised and saddened when, in early 2014, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) announced it was concluding its support for the Clinical Scholars Program and that the cohort entering July 2015 would be its last. Among those saddened by the announcement were those residents who had aimed to apply. The program had been open to those who had completed residencies in any specialty.

We are writing to tell you that the four current sites of the RWJF Clinical Scholars Program (University of California, Los Angeles; University of Michigan; University of Pennsylvania; and Yale University) have created the National Clinician Scholars Program (NCSP) to advance new visions based on the legacy of the original program. Those who had hoped to apply to be Clinical Scholars entering July 2016 can now apply to be National Clinician Scholars for the same year. More can be learned about that process at [nationalcsp.org](http://nationalcsp.org).

There will be some changes to the program because health and health care are changing. One change is that the program will now also accept doctorally trained nurses, whereas in the past the program trained only physicians. The nation needs inclusive partnerships to address its challenging health and health care goals. Second, once the NCSP is launched, we aim to expand the program beyond the current four sites. Those details have not yet been determined, but the objective is to recognize that many other

institutions have the potential to contribute toward our goals. In addition to these changes, many of the central elements that made the RWJF Clinical Scholars Program so effective and valuable will be maintained.

We are excited about this new initiative, and we hope you are, too. It would be hard to overstate the importance of the Clinical Scholars Program to academic general internal medicine, to medicine as a whole, or to the last several decades of health and health care in the United States more generally. This program can be credited with bringing health services research and health policy activity into mainstream academic medicine by selecting and training physicians to advance health and health care in ways decidedly more social than biomedical. In addition to supporting its “Scholars,” the program supported academic infrastructure and professional networks both to create a new field and to accelerate the recognition of that field—all with tremendous support from the VA. General internal medicine was hardly the only beneficiary of this monumental effort. Clinical Scholars, now nearly 2,000 of them, have come from all specialties. But the Clinical Scholars Program grew up at the same time as academic general internal medicine, and it’s hard to imagine what either might look like now without the other.

The program began in 1969 with support from the Carnegie Corporation and the Commonwealth Fund. The RWJF assumed financial responsibility in 1973, and the Veterans Health Administration became a central partner. There are reports in the literature of the program’s start,<sup>1</sup> and a frank and engaging recounting of its origins was published as part of a Festschrift to Hal Holman, one of the program’s

founders.<sup>2</sup> The program did not have humble beginnings. It grew from a bold vision, and its output has been spectacular. About half of the winners of SGIM’s Glaser Award were RWJF Clinical Scholars, and others have had central roles in the program. There are departments and training programs in academic institutions across the nation that would not exist today were it not for the field building the program supported—not just at the few places that have been training sites but at the many places where alumni have landed and made contributions. Leadership in US health and health care—in industry, government, philanthropy, clinical service, and academia—is peppered with those who grew up in this program or were touched by it.

This is why it was so essential to keep going. We have worked closely with the RWJF and the VA in the design of the NCSP and value the shared goals going forward. In parallel, the Foundation has been working toward the design of a new set of human capital programs of its own. In the meantime, we are delighted to announce that the NCSP is open for business.

### References

1. Shuster AL, Cluff LE, Haynes MA, Hook EW, Rogers DE. An innovation in physician training: the Clinical Scholars Program. *J Med Ed* 1983; 58:101-11.
2. Gardner JR, Krevans J, Mahoney M. A conversation about the Clinical Scholars Program: the training of nonbiomedical fellows inside the modern academic medical center. *Medical Care* 2002; 40(4Suppl2):25-31.