Postdoctoral Fellowship in Patient-engaged Research and Novel Patient-centered Trials

Postdoctoral Position with the Scleroderma Patient-centered Intervention Network

Dr. Brett Thombs (www.thombsresearchteam.ca/) of McGill University and the Scleroderma Patient-centered Intervention Network (SPIN; www.spinsclero.com), in partnership with Scleroderma Canada (www.scleroderma.ca), is seeking a postdoctoral fellow for work in patient-engaged research. The fellowship includes training in the design and conduct of clinical trials via novel international trials of patient-centered interventions in a rare disease context. This is a two-year position supported by the Mitacs fellowship program (www.mitacs.ca/en).

Scleroderma is a rare autoimmune connective tissue disease that causes significant disability and disfigurement. SPIN was created to bring together people living with scleroderma, health professionals, and scleroderma researchers from around the world to develop, test, and disseminate accessible support tools for people with scleroderma, including self-management, rehabilitation, psychological, and educational tools.

Rare conditions like scleroderma are often under-studied, and patients usually have few or no tested treatment options, such as the kind of resources and support programs that are typically available to people with more common conditions. One reason for this is that the small number of patients with any given rare disease is a barrier to effectively developing, testing, and disseminating such programs. SPIN has addressed these barriers by (1) fostering a high level of patient engagement in all aspects of its research and program development; (2) leveraging the combined efforts of the international scleroderma community; (3) adapting well-tested patient support strategies from other chronic diseases to meet the needs of people with scleroderma and delivering them via the internet to increase accessibility; and (4) utilizing novel trial designs (e.g., cmRCT, partially nested designs) to conduct large, but efficient, trials in a resource-starved, but expensive, rare disease research and patient-care environment. SPIN is currently engaged in three trials, all funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

SPIN is seeking a postdoctoral fellow to coordinate a novel randomized controlled trial of the SPIN-SSLED Program, which is a videoconference-based training program for patient leaders of scleroderma support groups. The SPIN-SSLED Program aims to improve support group leader efficacy and, thus, to increase the effectiveness of existing support groups, reduce burden on support group leaders, and increase the availability of support groups. The postdoctoral fellow may also assist with the design and oversight of clinical trials for other interventions, including online programs that address body image concerns due to disease-related disfigurement, coping with emotional distress resulting from scleroderma, and physical activity support for scleroderma patients via the SPIN Cohort. Finally, the postdoctoral fellow will have the opportunity to engage in other patient-oriented research, such as research to support the development of tools to help people with scleroderma understand benefits and risks and to make difficult medical decisions.
Trainees with Dr. Thombs take on significant responsibility and have published extensively (https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/7a652b_25db4233ae414f09b7c0016aa1397f80.pdf). The postdoctoral fellow will gain experience in the design and management of large international trials, data analysis, manuscript development (including first-authored publications), dissemination of results via national and international conferences, grant writing, and mentoring of students and staff. The postdoctoral fellow will have the opportunity to learn cutting-edge techniques for large-scale non-pharmacological trials. Dr. Thombs, along with SPIN Co-Director Dr. Linda Kwakkenbos, currently lead a CIHR-funded international team that is developing a CONSORT extension for reporting of clinical trials using cohorts and routinely-collected data (www.researchintegrityjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s41073-018-0053-3).

As a patient-centered initiative, SPIN collaborates closely with individuals with scleroderma and patient organizations through all stages of research. As such, the fellow will receive training in the areas of patient engagement and research designed in partnership with patients, which will directly impact support and quality of life outcomes for people with a devastating rare disease.

**Training Environment:** SPIN is an international collaboration of over 150 members, including patients, patient organizations, researchers, and health care providers from 7 countries (Canada, USA, UK, France, Spain, Australia, Mexico) that is directed by Dr. Thombs. SPIN actively partners with > 20 Canadian and international patient organizations and maintains a cohort of > 1,800 patients from > 40 recruiting sites. The postdoctoral fellow will interact with SPIN’s international multidisciplinary team, which includes psychologists, rheumatologists, methodologists, and patient research partners from around the world. Dr. Thombs is affiliated with the McGill’s Departments of Psychiatry, Psychology, and Epidemiology, and the fellow will have the opportunity to participate in training activities, including seminars, in these departments and at the Jewish General Hospital. In the last 5 years, trainees under Dr. Thombs’ supervision have first-authored over 60 peer-reviewed articles and have co-authored articles more than 120 times.

**Eligibility:** Applicants should have a recent doctoral degree in a health-related field, such as psychology, public health, or epidemiology. The doctoral degree should be obtained by the date of hire.

**Salary:** Salary is $50,000.

**Location:** The postdoctoral fellow will work primarily at McGill University and the Jewish General Hospital in Montréal, Québec. Applications from candidates for distance/remote fellowships may also be considered in certain circumstances.

**Start Date:** Start date is flexible, but candidate must be able to begin full-time work by September, 2019.

**To apply:** Applicants should send (1) a cover letter explaining their interest in the fellowship and how working in this position would support their career goals, (2) a curriculum vitae, (3) an unofficial transcript, (4) reprints or preprints of published articles or submitted manuscripts, and (5) contact information for three references to Ms. Claire Fedoruk (claire.fedoruk@gmail.com). Candidates who are selected for an interview will be contacted on a rolling basis until the position is filled.