



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
FACULTY OF MEDICINE



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University of Toronto



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MEDICAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION AND CREMS-SPONSORED

DR. ELVA MAY ROWE FUND

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH SUMMER RESEARCH PROGRAM  
2017 SUPERVISOR PROJECT INFORMATION FORM

If you wish to act as a Supervisor for a first or second year University of Toronto medical student wishing to conduct a research project abroad between June and August 2017, please complete the below form with as much detail as possible.

**PLEASE PROVIDE A COPY OF THE ON-SITE SUPERVISOR'S CV. THIS IS REQUIRED FOR THE ADJUDICATION PROCESS.**

\*\*Submit this form to [crems.programs@utoronto.ca](mailto:crems.programs@utoronto.ca) by the deadline of Thursday January 5, 2017.\*\*

**PART A: Supervisor and On-Site Supervisor Contact Information**

<b>UofT Researcher:</b>	<b>Dr. Arun V. Ravindran</b>
Email Address:	<a href="mailto:arun.ravindran@camh.ca">arun.ravindran@camh.ca</a>
Telephone:	416-979-6933
Mailing Address:	250 College St., Toronto, ON M5T 1R8
Department:	Psychiatry
Degree (MD, PhD, MD/PhD):	MD/PhD
SGS Appointment/where?:	Professor and Director, Global Mental Health and the Office of Fellowship Training, Department of Psychiatry; Institute of Medical Sciences, University of Toronto
Selected Publications (3 most recent and relevant to the project the student will be working on):	
<b>Name of On-site Supervisor:</b>	<b>Dr. Shehan Williams</b>
Location of placement (Name of Institution/hospital; City; Country):	University of Kelaniya Teaching Hospital
Email Address:	<a href="mailto:shehanwil@gmail.com">shehanwil@gmail.com</a>
Telephone:	011 94 774301 303
Degree (MD, PhD, MD/PhD):	MD
Area of Medicine of the Research Project (2 keywords):	Psychiatric presentations in primary care, cultural and gender differences



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### **PART B: PROJECT INFORMATION**

**Project Title (this can be modified later, but we would like to have working title from the start):**

Psychiatric morbidity and cultural differences in presentation among family practice patients in Sri Lanka

**Provide background information on the project and program/institution; max 500 words:**

It is well documented that the majority of patients with mental illness seek care first from their primary care physician. Since mental illness is considered a stigma, even in Western countries and despite increased public education, the somatic presentation of mental illness in primary care (i.e. the reporting of medically unexplained physical symptoms that are found to have a psychic source) can be quite common. Studies have found that 70- 85% of patients worldwide, regardless of geographic region, initially report only physical symptoms to the family physician, and admit to psychological difficulties only upon further questioning.

Cultural variations in the presentation of mental illness have also been noted. Higher reporting of somatic symptoms and lower reporting of psychological symptoms have been found in Asian versus Western patients, even when the severity of mental illness is similar. The type of somatic symptoms described may also differ by culture. For example, Asian patients with depression or anxiety frequently report gastrointestinal symptoms, headache, dizziness and musculoskeletal pain, while depressed Western patients are more likely to complain of fatigue, lack of energy and sleep difficulties, or inner tension, nervousness or fear in the presence of anxiety conditions.

Literature on psychiatric morbidity among patients presenting to primary care is sparse. In addition, while it is acknowledged that somatic presentations of mental illness is common in Asian populations, the relationship of specific symptoms to psychiatric illnesses has not been well studied.

The aim of this project is to conduct a cross-sectional evaluation of psychiatric morbidity among patients (n=60) seeking treatment for physical/medical issues at the University of Kelaniya teaching hospital family medicine clinic. Under supervision, students will document the presence of medically unexplained physical symptoms and will evaluate any psychiatric symptoms, as well as determine the presence of any mental illness using validated and culturally adapted tools, including the general health questionnaire (GHQ) and the Beck Depression Inventory questionnaire. Cultural differences in presentation (versus Western populations) and data on gender, education, age and demographic factors will also be evaluated.

It is anticipated that this data will add to the literature on somatic and cultural presentations of mental illness in primary care. It will also provide a context for better understanding and treatment of the mental health needs of the Sri Lankan diaspora, particularly in Toronto.

**What, if any, second language is required for the student to successfully complete this project?**

English is spoken widely in Sri Lanka. Knowledge of Tamil and/or Sinhalese would be useful. However, it is anticipated that the students will work closely with a senior resident, who would be fluent in local languages and in English.



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<p><b>Is this project for 1 or 2 students to complete?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1      <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2</p>	
<p><b>How long have you worked with the on-site supervisor and briefly describe your working partnership:</b></p> <p>I have collaborated for over 15 years with Dr. Shehan Williams, who is Head of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Kelaniya, which is located in Ragama. There is an official MOU between the Departments of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto and the University of Kelaniya. In association with this MOU, a collaborative clinician-scientist training program is currently underway at the University of Kelaniya, and Dr. Williams is the supervisor of one of the senior physician trainee enrolled in the program. He has also supervised UToronto students on CREMS-sponsored international research over the past 3 years, who had very good learning experiences, resulting in several presentations and publications related to their projects.</p>	
<p><b>Have you visited the city/town where the medical student will be placed? If yes, when was your last visit?</b></p> <p>I visit Sri Lanka frequently for global health work, and regularly spend time at the University of Kelaniya. I plan to be there in February 2017, during which I will have the opportunity to liaise further with the local faculty at the University of Kelaniya Teaching Hospital.</p>	
<p><b>Student's roles/responsibilities in bullet form (Please be as <u>specific</u> as possible):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work under supervision to review patient charts, interview patients and family members and collect relevant data</li> <li>• Develop database and analyze data</li> <li>• Produce final report and disseminate the specific findings by presentations and publications.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Is this project for a specific student, or will you interview and select an interested student who would contact you directly for this opportunity? <i>Note: All supervisor/student applications will be adjudicated by a panel of faculty, given a score, and ranked based on the score given. Funding will be based on ranking.</i></b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> For a specific student. <u>Name</u> of student:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> For whichever student is chosen after interview</p>
<p><b>If human subjects are involved, has Ethics been obtained? (Note: Written proof or an email indicating protocol approval may be requested prior to the student's arrival at on-site location)</b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes      <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No      <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>Application for ethics approval will be made as soon as the successful student candidates are selected.</p>

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