Comprehensive Research Experience for Medical Students
Summer Research Program 2020

Supervisor/Project Information Form
Due February 6, 2020 by email to crems.programs@utoronto.ca

Supervisor Name: Dr. Donald Redelmeier

Project Title: Behavioral Economics of Altruism in Medicine

Hospital/Research Institution: Sunnybrook Research Institute and ICES
Email: dar@ices.on.ca
Field of Research (2 keywords): medical decision science, palliative care medicine
Department: Medicine
School of Graduate Studies Appointment? Yes Please name: IHPME

Brief Project Description (<300 words):
Expressing compassion toward patients is an integral component of medical care. We hypothesize such compassion is sometimes not rational and, therefore, often better understood by behavioral economic insights. From a rational perspective, in particular, healthcare professionals should express more compassion toward poor patients than rich patients due to ethical principles for equity. In contrast, we theorize healthcare professionals may express less compassion for the poor due to presumed acclimatization.

The project will use ICES databases (n > 50,000) to identify rates of medical assistance in dying for rich, poor, and middle-class patients. Contrary to popular intuitions, we anticipate that medical assistance in dying is not disproportionally targeted at vulnerable poor patients. Instead, we hypothesize that poor patients are distinctly unlikely to receive medical assistance in dying. If true, an awareness of this finding may help improve choice architecture and compassionate care for poor patients in less extreme clinical settings.

The student will conduct extensive background scholarly reading and critical thinking in behavioural economics and in health sciences. The student will meet the supervisor on a regular basis. The student will gain experience in research strategies, survey design, constructing an annotated bibliography, conducting statistical analysis, interpreting results, and drafting a relevant manuscript. The student will also gain contacts for networking in medical science and for collaborating with experts in behavioural economics.