

Shifting the Paradigm: Alternative Perspectives and Solutions to Increasing the Availability of Quality Internships

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The internship crisis facing the field of professional psychology is complex and multidetermined. The aim of this commentary is to broaden the discussion initiated by Hatcher (2011, The internship supply as a common-pool resource: A pathway to managing the imbalance problem, *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 5, pp. 126–140.) in his article that likens the match crisis to a common-pool resource problem. The authors contend that there are critical issues that must be considered in order to solve the match crisis, namely, the recognized need for a full-scale workforce analysis, the need to increase funding resources, and the recognition of alternative models of internship training. An existing additional pool of vetted high quality internships may not have been fully considered by Hatcher (2011) and others in the field. This commentary presents a regional model exemplified by the California Psychology Internship Council (CAPIC) as one regional solution to the limited supply of internships and provides some information about the potential advantages and quality control measures used to monitor this vital resource.

Keywords: predoctoral internship, internship crisis, supply and demand, common-pool resource, CAPIC

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In a recent article, Hatcher (2011) applies common-pool resource logic to consider the internship imbalance. He provides an excellent framework for aiding the graduate education and training community in considering the impending challenges of the internship crisis in psychology. In keeping with the spirit of inclusivity and cooperation Hatcher (2011) promotes, we offer a few comments to add to the ongoing dialogue.

First, the reference to the internship shortage as an “imbalance” may presuppose that the problem should be conceptualized simply as a dyadic relationship between the number of students versus the number of quality internship slots. We recommend consideration of the current situation as an internship shortage or crisis rather than an imbalance. We suggest that the term be framed as a triadic relationship between the bottleneck that exists between many students applying for an inadequate number of internship slots and the jobs obtained by those same people after they have graduated. Thus, we consider the current crisis or shortage of internships in relationship to both the number of students seeking internship and the number of jobs available for these graduates. Recognition of the continuum from internship to employment might enable us to more effectively address the shortage of internships. If there is no shortage of jobs, and only a shortage of internships, then how has the internship failed to reflect the job market? Is the internship shortage a function of overly stringent accreditation standards for internships? Is our conception of internship based on a model that was developed for a health care system that no longer exists? If, as predicted, the number of jobs for psychologists will be increasing by as much as 20% (American Psychological Association, n.d.), why is organized psychology unable to create more internship opportunities?

In his commentary to Hatcher’s (2011) article, McCutcheon (2011) adds important perspectives, specifically including the basic lack of a psychology workforce analysis. Until a detailed workforce analysis can be performed, it would be premature to suggest that the shortage is simply a result of too many students. Judging from what little workforce analysis data exists (Hart & Pate, 2011), and from the fact that graduate programs are being reaccredited based, in part, on their ability to report the job settings and activities of graduates, it appears that psychology graduates are obtaining employment. More data are needed to gain a precise accounting of the jobs and roles psychologists are occupying, and to better characterize the markets in which our services are sought and what should be the size of the profession. Hatcher (2011, p. 130) presents several proposals by others suggesting ways in which limiting access to the internship common pool could be undertaken through mandates for the reduction of admissions or class size of programs based on various criteria. His following commentary did not support this as a viable approach. In addition, given the current paucity of information related to current and projected workforce needs for psychologists, shrinking the profession would be premature and, indeed, may even be dangerous to the profession and the public.

The concept of common-pool resources may be too reductionist and constraining to how we think about the internship shortage. Envisioning a solution to the crisis must embrace conceptualizations that extend beyond supply and demand. Poor support for psychology training may not simply be due to the relatively large supply of doctoral students seeking internships from a limited supply. Rather, we should recognize the potential need for psy-

chologists in areas of practice in which our profession is poorly represented in quantity, such as behavioral health care (Runyan, 2011), and the reports of the nation’s need to replace an aging workforce (Annapolis Coalition on the Behavioral Health Workforce, 2007). If the internship shortage is disproportionate to an abundant job market, then we may be wiser to advocate for internship training models that have greater flexibility and relevance to the profession being practiced. Hatcher (2011) discusses the accreditation cost relief and consortium arrangements as a means of expanding the internship pool. However, his recommendations merely touch upon the potential of advocacy activities. Can the profession affirm the social relevance of psychology practice? Can we show our resolve to develop integrated care in the more than 8,000 federally funded community health centers in the nation?

Advocacy

The second point we wish to raise is relative to advocacy and to our belief that the issue of this crisis should be addressed to the whole of organized psychology and not just to the education and training community. Training and education are fundamental to all of psychology, and our efforts to advocate for funding for psychology training should emanate from every segment of our profession, not solely by the education community. Many educators pay the practice assessment on their dues statements, yet the American Psychological Association (APA) Practice Organization’s overall advocacy efforts devoted to resolution of the internship crisis have been wanting. This may reflect the continuing silo mentality that has been widely recognized within organized psychology (American Psychological Association Policy and Planning Board, 2011). The Education Advocacy Trust (EdAT) provides a similar framework for psychologists to voluntarily contribute money to advocacy efforts related to the educational and training interests of psychology. However, the amount of money being contributed by educators is far too little to address the scope of the internship crisis, and every effort should be made to increase psychology educators’ awareness about EdAT and to encourage their financial contributions to the trust.

Regional organizations like the California Psychology Internship Council (CAPIC) have also been active in advocating for available resources in California for intern training. To date, CAPIC has successfully advocated for the addition of over \$8.5 million toward internship training in California.

Funding Resources

Our third point relates to the availability of funding resources to support internship training. Why do we have such little stake in the roughly \$8 billion annually spent through the American Medical Association’s Graduate Medical Education program, particularly at a time when there is a fundamental belief that the future of health care must be integrated with behavioral health? The American Psychological Association’s Graduate Psychology Education program is the only line item in the nation’s budget solely dedicated to psychology education and training. This program has tremendous potential for helping fund internship positions. Why is the issue left to only one small segment of the APA’s advocacy arm—the Education Public Policy Office and the Education Ad-

vocacy Trust? Our experience in California suggests that regional networks of internships may be very effective in advocating for the development of internships that can increase the numbers of training positions for graduate students, provide service for underserved populations in the communities where students live, and create a stream of potential employees for positions available in community mental health agencies across the United States.

Organizations in the field of psychology need to be part of the solution by stepping up their efforts to develop innovative strategies to address the scarcity of funding in many excellent training sites serving the underserved. CAPIC advocated with the state of California for allocation of funds to support psychology interns in California. In 2008 and 2011, CAPIC successfully competed for this funding and was awarded over 5.1 million dollars (of the \$8.5 million dollars mentioned previously) for both funding cycles through a program established by State Proposition 63, which directed money through the California Department of Mental Health for expansion of services and increasing the workforce of mental health professionals. CAPIC oversees the distribution of stipends supported through this award to doctoral interns in the amount of \$20,772 per full-time equivalent (FTE).

Regional Approaches to Internship Training

We propose that one potential resource that can be nurtured to address the complex issues surrounding the internship imbalance/shortages and quality is regional stakeholders. There are several reasons why regional stakeholders can contribute to innovative and quality solutions. First, they are more familiar with regional issues across a broad range of training and employment domains. Second, they can foster partnerships with doctoral programs and potential internship sites effectively, and often rapidly, because of their mutual interests, their knowledge of the region, and their local resources. These localized partnerships may provide unique opportunities for growing new internship sites through a more hands-on technical assistance approach between academic programs and community and agency stakeholders. Fiscally impacted mental health service agencies may develop or increase capacity for offering quality internship training through the direct or indirect support provided by regional training organizations and their members. Sharing of collective resources, including access to training presentations, specialized supervision, and a variety of rich clinical opportunities, can be organized at the local level, resulting in viable consortium-based internships. Third, regional solutions address the demographic needs of both doctoral students who are rooted in their communities and the communities they serve, which benefit from more geographically rooted professionals who can provide more continuity of care. Fourth, regional entities may have access to regional funding resources that are not available at the national level, as CAPIC and several doctoral programs have already demonstrated with the California Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funding.

CAPIC: An Example of a Regional Approach to Internship Training

Over the last 20 years, regional networks have developed internships in response to the need for quality internship training opportunities. In 1991, a collective of academic institutions located

in the San Francisco Bay Area providing doctoral education in clinical psychology came together to identify and develop local opportunities for quality doctoral internship training. This local initiative culminated in the evolution of CAPIC. CAPIC resulted from the realization that there needed to be a more standardized approach to determining the quality of the internships in California. Over the last 20 years, CAPIC has successfully focused on identifying and developing local internship opportunities and providing high quality internship training experiences, which have led to thousands of doctoral students within the state of California successfully completing program-mandated training requirements in a wide variety of settings that serve diverse populations in great need of mental health services. CAPIC has supported its member internships in obtaining APA accreditation, and, over time, many have been successful in doing so.

Membership Criteria

CAPIC is a membership organization, like the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC), and includes doctoral programs as well as internship and postdoctoral agencies. CAPIC's membership is comprised of California APA-accredited and/or regionally accredited doctoral clinical psychology programs. At present, 32 doctoral programs, 21 of which are APA accredited, from 17 academic institutions are members of CAPIC. In addition, there are presently 169 CAPIC-member predoctoral internship agencies and 16 postdoctoral training programs, all approved through CAPIC's extensive vetting process. The internship agencies represent a spectrum of training sites similar to APPIC's and include community mental health agencies, university counseling centers, inpatient psychiatric facilities, school-based programs, to name some of the major categories of internship agencies. Member internships represent 1-year full-time, 2-year half-time, and 1-year half-time training opportunities, offering a richness of experiences, with a strong representation of those focused on providing mental health services to underserved and underrepresented populations. These training sites provide opportunities for students to obtain excellent clinical experiences within the communities in which they and their families reside, and within which they are committed to working postlicensure.

This corepresentation of both the vested academic programs and training sites serves CAPIC well. It supports the ongoing commitment to the development of, and adherence to, maintaining high quality training experiences that serve both the communities and the academic institutions dedicated to supplying these opportunities for their students. The CAPIC Board of Directors is similarly composed of representatives from member academic programs, training sites, and predoctoral interns and/or postdoctoral fellows from both northern and southern regions of the state, and is actively involved in ongoing oversight of the membership and internship application process.

Quality Control Criteria

In Hatcher's (2011) article, internships that do not hold membership in APPIC (including CAPIC) were referenced as those that "state licensing boards accept as satisfactory for licensure requirements provided they meet minimal state-specified criteria", and, as such, "establishes a more lenient quality control system that is at

considerable variance from APPIC criteria,” per his personal communication with Stephen DeMers (Hatcher, 2011, p. 128).

To maintain quality control within the profession, CAPIC has well-established processes for vetting applicant internship sites. Internship training sites apply for membership in CAPIC through completion of an application and review process that includes documentation of the site meeting CAPIC membership criteria and mandatory periodic site visits. CAPIC’s membership criteria are primarily in tandem with that of APPIC’s (see CAPIC’s website, <http://www.capic.net>). It has been our experience that regional solutions to the need for development of high quality internship training opportunities lend themselves to a more hands-on approach in assuring quality. CAPIC board members involved in conducting site visits are either locally and/or regionally colocated with the applying site and have a more thorough understanding of local issues and challenges facing training within their particular region.

Internship Match Process

In 2010, CAPIC successfully implemented its first fully electronic internship application process. Like APPIC, CAPIC’s internship match process is now completely electronic, offering two match dates, followed by an ongoing clearinghouse service. Last year, CAPIC matched 443 students at predoctoral internship positions located within 169 CAPIC-member internship programs. This has represented a pool of hundreds of students that were taken out of the national commons, greatly alleviating the internship shortage while providing equal access to excellence in training.

Summary and Conclusions

In addition to identifying national solutions to the internship imbalance or shortage, regional solutions offer a plurality of stakeholders that can contribute to more sustainable resources and solutions in a changing and unpredictable climate of increasing limitations of resources, as well as shifting economic and political forces, that impact psychology. As one example of a regional solution, CAPIC has, over many years, demonstrated excellence in its ability to develop and provide fully vetted, quality internship training opportunities to the students it serves. These training opportunities are nested within the local and regional communities represented in CAPIC’s membership and state demographics. Furthermore, CAPIC has been successfully fulfilling the mental health service needs of those communities, while upholding and monitoring the quality of the training provided to interns placed within these sites as well as APA’s ethical call for social justice and benevolence. CAPIC serves as an exemplar on how regional efforts can successfully result in the development of new training sites and the provision of ongoing quality assurance. Similar regional efforts have been established throughout the country and may collectively provide the means to increase quality training opportunities that will reduce the demand on those sites that hold

membership in APPIC. Regional efforts can be one of many promising answers to the existing crisis if a wider continuum of solutions is considered.

In his article, Hatcher (2011) referenced steps to take toward an inclusive solution. We agree that inclusion should be a central tenet in determining the next steps we will take toward identifying solutions. “It takes a village to grow a child,” the old African proverb states, and it also takes innovation and leadership to address a twenty-first-century internship crisis. We are collectively facing daunting economic times at a national, as well as a local, level, concurrent to increases in the number of those seeking to advance their career aspirations in the field of psychology through doctoral-level education. In the case of “growing” quality internship experiences, it will surely take at least a village of all of those dedicated toward achieving this goal to move forward with greater openness and flexibility in reviewing viable and effective paths toward finding solutions to resolve the challenges before us. It is hoped that the table for such discourse will welcome all groups dedicated toward this end to take a seat and further expand the conversation pertaining to identifying solutions. By enlarging the discussion to include all parties concerned, opening the dialogue to explore new approaches and solutions, and acknowledging additional quality resources to share, the clarion call may shift from a need to reduce access to resources to one for generative and effective solutions that facilitates access.

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