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Dear Dr. Thomas:

I am delighted to provide a letter summarizing the accomplishments of Sara M. Shunkwiler during her participation in the program. I have not previously been a mentor in this program, but I was pleased to have the opportunity to work with Sara and I have found the program to be an excellent way to structure a research learning experience.

Regarding the criteria stipulated by the program, Sara has been very conscientious in taking the initiative to meet with me to ensure she received the required mentorship. She followed me even onto the inpatient units to discuss her research progress and develop an understanding of the research process and particularly the 'two hats' that a clinician-researcher must wear. Out of this process Sara developed a thorough understanding of the role of a clinical researcher in an academic environment. She also took part in one of my lectures to the Geriatrics Interest Group in the Spring of 2004 and sought out my guidance in understanding the necessary steps in developing a research career in geriatrics. I have encouraged her to continue our dialogue as she continues to contemplate her research career.


Sara has also completed the second requirement of sixteen weeks of participation in an active research project. She achieved this over a two-summer period of time, first completing ten weeks of research in 2002 as a Hartford Foundation/ AFAR Medical Student Geriatric Scholar at UCLA under the direction of Catherine Sarkisian, MD, MSPH. The following summer she completed an additional eight weeks of research in 2003 as a UI Medical Student Research Fellow under the direction of Ann Broderick, MD (Int Med), and Marcy Rosenbaum PhD. In this second summer of her research project experience, she completed a very innovative and timely study addressing student attitudes toward a hospice experience and this project has been published in the Journal of Palliative Medicine this year. I find this particularly impressive as she followed through from the data collection period to manuscript preparation to publishing, which is truly a comprehensive experience of the research process.

In terms of her requirement to maintain participation in research-related activities throughout her four years of training, Sara developed a 'Research Activities' plan with my assistance that included attendance at Research Seminar and Grand Rounds presentations as my schedule allowed. Sara also maintained her research participation by working on manuscripts throughout the last two years. As mentioned above, one has been published, entitled: "Pilot of a Hospice-Based Elective to Learn Comfort with Dying Patients in Undergraduate Medical Education" Journal of Palliative Care Medicine 2005 April; 8 (2): 344-353. Another manuscript from her experience as a Hartford Foundation/ AFAR Medical Student Geriatric Scholar at UCLA has recently been submitted for publication. The citation for the abstract for this project is: Shunkwiler S, Mangione CM, Sarkisian CA. Ethnic Differences in Expectations Regarding Aging Among Older Adults. Journal of the American Geriatric Society. 2003 May; 51: S219. Sara also sought out additional coursework in the fall of 2003 to enhance her understanding of a research career, in the following class: Survival Skills for a Research Career, 060:204. This class was instrumental in providing an understanding of how to build a research career and most importantly how to garner funding when starting a research career.

Sara has completed a final summary of her research project, which was completed with the published article listed above in the Journal of Palliative Care Medicine. She has also completed the requirement of orally presenting her project, as it was presented at each of the following venues: 1. UI Medical Student Research Day "An Approach to End-of-Life Education: Learning About the Dying Process Through Hospice Volunteering," September, 2003, 2. May 2003 American Geriatrics Society Annual Meeting Presidential Poster Session: Baltimore, MD "Differences in Expectations Regarding Aging among Older Adults," May 2003 3. The 25th Midwestern Conference on Healthcare in the Elderly Poster Session "Expectations regarding Aging Among Older Adults: Does Ethnicity Make a Difference?" January 2003. Finally, she indicated that she has obtained final approval from the Medical Student Research Council.

I have been pleased to have the opportunity to work with Sara and hope that the skills she has learned will be used throughout her career. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,



Susan K. Schultz M.D.  
Associate Professor of Psychiatry  
Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine

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