

**Request for Proposals: The Use of Patients' Electronic Communications in Psychiatric
Evaluation and Treatment**

Letters of intent due September 30, 2017

The Once Upon a Time Foundation (a Fort Worth-based private foundation that has given away over \$50 million) is pleased to announce a major multi-center research funding opportunity. Grants totaling \$3 million will be awarded for clinical studies on "The Use of Patients' Electronic Communications in Psychiatric Evaluation and Treatment." We are now accepting letters of intent proposing clinical research studies relevant to this topic. Multiple grants of up to a maximum of \$1 million each may be awarded to support several concurrent research projects, with funding beginning as early as December 2017. Participation in the program will include attendance at one-day investigator meetings in the DFW area every six months at the Foundation's expense.

Overview and Background

Grants will be made to qualified investigators who wish to test the hypothesis that, at least under some instances, the diagnosis and treatment of a patient with a mental illness might be aided if the treating mental health professional has access to what the patient is communicating to others via social media and/or via emails/texts. Access to these peer-to-peer communications (with prior patient consent) might enable therapists to understand with improved accuracy and speed how individuals present themselves to and interact with others, and it might help in the detection of psychotic and mood symptoms, substance abuse, or danger to self or others.

The Once Upon a Time Foundation recently funded the preparation of a comprehensive white paper by Paul Appelbaum, MD, the Dollard Professor of Psychiatry, Medicine & Law in the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University, and Carl Fisher, MD, Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at Columbia University, which explores issues related to mental health professionals and their access to patients' electronic communications. The paper was published online in May 2017 on the Harvard Review of Psychiatry's website and may also be viewed at <http://www.onceuponatime.org/docs/PatientsElectronicCommunications.pdf>.

This paper discusses how electronic sources of data – including social media – may be extremely valuable in psychiatric evaluations and treatment, and it highlights the need for more clinical research in this area.

As electronic communications have become an increasingly important part of people's lives, the authors draw attention to an **urgent need** to consider whether this information could be useful in mental health professional's practices and what the issues of using this information might be.

Along with highlighting some of the possible practical, financial, and/or ethical concerns about the use of electronic collateral information in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness, the white paper also outlines the potential utility of such usage. Some of the benefits include the possible revelation of information that the patient may have otherwise withheld and of symptoms often associated with impaired insight, such as mania, psychosis, or suicide and other self-harm. Electronic communications might also help monitor problematic behaviors and might give mental health professionals useful insight into patterns of patients' activities. The authors also discuss the use of this information in the treatment of minors. Collateral information is generally

regarded as essential to the treatment of minors, and children and adolescents are often extensively involved in technology, including social media; it therefore seems particularly important to explore the use of electronic collateral information in the treatment of younger patients.

The authors conclude that it would be useful to pursue further analysis of the multiple dimensions of child and adolescent mental health relative to this topic and that even clinicians skeptical about incorporating the review of patients' electronic activities into their practice need to consider its potential usefulness. Hence, there is an urgent need for additional clinical research. For further insight into the questions and issues raised by the use of patients' electronic collateral information in psychiatric evaluation and treatment, please review the full paper at:

<http://www.onceuponatime.org/docs/PatientsElectronicCommunications.pdf>.

Specific Areas of Interest for Research

The Once Upon a Time Foundation is interested in providing funding for studies in which therapists approach their patients in a systematic way to determine their willingness to consent to the therapist having full access to the patient's social media and/or email/text communications in conjunction with their care.

Those patients who do consent would be followed for six to eighteen months with the clinical investigator documenting (subjectively and/or with objective data) how often information surfaced from social media, emails, texts, etc. was useful in diagnosis and treatment. Additionally, the clinical investigator would attempt to categorize how such information was or was not useful and what barriers to its utility, if any, were identified.

It is anticipated that there could be an initial focus on higher risk patient populations such as those with addiction, psychosis, or suicidal tendencies, and that younger patients might be a good population to study initially because of their proclivity for the use of technology. However, the Foundation will entertain studies across any patient population.

If preliminary data obtained in these studies suggest that incorporating access to electronic communications into patients' mental health diagnosis and treatment is beneficial, the Foundation would anticipate providing additional funding for expanded clinical studies.

Application Instructions

Letter of Intent (LOI) Stage

An LOI should be mailed to The Once Upon a Time Foundation by September 30, 2017, at the following address:

Once Upon a Time Foundation
Attn: Pat Dunne, President
301 Commerce Street, Suite 3200
Fort Worth, TX 76102
Or emailed to fundingrequests@onceuponatime.org

The LOI should contain:

1. The names and institutional affiliations of the principal investigator and any collaborators, along with their proposed roles and brief biographical summaries including current professional titles, affiliations, and education backgrounds.
2. Specific process and timing for identifying patient populations and obtaining IRB approval and patient consents. Proposals should target obtaining patient consents within three months of funding approval and commencement of the study.
3. An estimated budget summary.
4. A description of the proposed incorporation of technology, including social media, into patient care.
5. A timeline with major milestones identified.

Full Proposal Stage

Principal Investigators invited to submit full proposals will be notified in October. Further details on the proposal submission process will be communicated to PIs who advance to the final stage. A description of items that will be required for full proposal submissions is listed below. Additional details on each of these items will be provided when full proposals are invited.

1. Cover Sheet
2. Table of Contents
3. Project Summary (one page)
4. Project Description
5. Project Timeline
6. Curriculum Vitae
7. Detailed Budget
8. Budget Narrative

Eligibility

The Principal Investigator must have a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and be affiliated with an accredited non-profit university, medical school, or other major research or clinical organization that can receive and manage grants. Initial projects must be accomplished within a two-year timeframe. Investigators must be able to attend one-day investigator meetings in the DFW area every six months during that time period at the Foundation's expense.

Evaluation of Proposals

The final proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

1. Fit with the intent of the RFP.
2. Likelihood that the proposal will receive timely IRB approval, will enroll significant (> 50) consenting patients in the study, and will be completed in timely fashion.
3. Specificity of the study plans.
4. Effectiveness and efficiency of the study proposal – what is the estimated cost per consenting patient?
5. Quality of the investigative team.

NOTE: The Foundation has interest and funding to underwrite MULTIPLE qualifying proposals. Thus, if the Foundation receives numerous complete and compelling proposals, it is likely it will fund multiple projects in parallel at different sponsoring institutions.

Application Timeline

Letters of Intent: Due September 30, 2017

Invitations for Full Proposals: October 2017

Full Proposals: Due November 30, 2017

Notice of Award: December 2017

Funding (Conditional on IRB approval of the research project): December 31, 2017

Project Completion: in or before February 2020

Contact Information

For more information about proposal procedures, eligibility, deadlines, resources, or any related questions, please contact us at:

Pat Dunne, President

Once Upon a Time Foundation

301 Commerce Street, Suite 3200

Fort Worth, TX 76102

817-332-9500

fundingrequests@onceuponatime.org

To view other research grants the Foundation has sponsored, please see <https://donate.utsouthwestern.edu/pages/donor-stories/donor-story-once-upon-a-time...march2017>.