

LEND AND PSYCHIATRY—A GOOD MATCH BY ELIZABETH TURNER

Vanderbilt LEND trainees typically come with backgrounds in audiology, occupational and physical therapy, and nursing, among other fields, but this year, LEND welcomed its first trainee in psychiatry.

Danica Denton was inspired at a young age by her father, a therapist who always wanted to go to medical school. She found her niche in psychology at the University of Arizona and pursued medical school after working alongside psychiatrists as a case manager at a community mental health agency in Tucson.

“I tried to keep an open mind during my medical school rotations and not pigeonhole myself to psychiatry,” Denton said. “However, when I asked my husband if he thought I should go for surgery or pediatrics, he replied that my eyes always lit up when I talked about my psychiatry rotations and that I was much happier there than on any other service.”

Denton was matched with Vanderbilt for her residency. “My first experience with children came on my very first rotation as an intern on the Child and Adolescent Inpatient Unit at the Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital, where I had two patients with autism. I really enjoyed working with them, and I realized that it took a team approach to care for these patients.”

After indicating her interest in autism to Psychiatry Department chair Stephan Heckers, M.D., Denton was put in contact with VKC autism researchers in Psychiatry, Blythe Corbett, Ph.D. and Jeremy Veenstra-VanderWeele, M.D.

“While I was planning my fourth year of residency, Dr. Veenstra-VanderWeele described LEND to me. I was immediately fascinated because I had felt for some time that a multidisciplinary approach in the treatment of children and adolescents with ASD was important,” she said. “LEND does a great job of allowing everyone who has an interest in ASD to show how their experience can complement everyone else’s to benefit patients.”



Danica Denton, Ph.D.

Denton also is working on autism research projects with Veenstra-VanderWeele. One study involves the use of the Autism Treatment Network (ATN) database to look at differences between children who are and are not prescribed atypical antipsychotics.

“I have learned a huge amount from others in LEND. I have learned how each discipline contributes to the care of children with ASD and how what each of us contributes can complement all the other pieces,” Denton said. ■

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