JACK’S Summer Scholars Program provides students with the opportunity to view the world of neonatology and pediatric subspecialties through clinical mentoring and research. Summer scholars have the opportunity to work with the neonatology and primary care teams as they provide care and conduct research related to infant and maternal health. Specific emphasis is placed on developing an understanding of health system administration of multidisciplinary hospital care. The program also enables participants to explore medical career opportunities in hospital medicine and pediatric subspecialties such as general surgery, anesthesiology, neurosurgery, neonatal intensive care and infectious diseases.

The goals of JACK’s Summer Scholars Program are to:

- Foster premedical and medical student interests in pediatric medicine careers.
- Demonstrate the medical profession’s role in improving public health through exploration of various neonatal research and clinical care activities.
- Use mentorship to educate scholars on the importance of a collaborative healthcare team environment in quality improvement and emphasize factors that are vital to developing medical professionalism.

Division of Neonatal Medicine

The JACK’s Program is anchored in the Division of Neonatal Medicine. Neonatal medicine (or neonatology) is a subspecialty of pediatrics that provides care to high risk newborns including full-term infants, premature infants, and critically ill infants with complex surgical needs or birth anomalies.

The Division of Neonatal Medicine provides multidisciplinary care in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Children’s Hospital of Richmond at VCU (CHoR), a children’s hospital within the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Medical Center. Quiet surroundings, private rooms and cutting-edge technologies for newborns all contribute to the safe, collaborative environment of CHoR’s NICU that was specifically designed to speed the healing process. The unit provides care for the highest level of patient acuity in Central Virginia and is a resource and transfer hub for infants who require a higher level of care unavailable anywhere else in the community.

Summer Scholar Mentor Team

The team is divided into shadow and research faculty mentors that provide oversight in a multifaceted program dedicated to improving the education of tomorrow’s health care leaders. The mentors focus on education in medical care, research and medical hospital system administration.

The multidisciplinary mentor team includes:
- Neonatologists
- Maternal-fetal medicine experts
- Pediatric pulmonologists
- General pediatric surgeons
- Pediatric neurosurgeons
- Pediatric Anesthesiologists
- Pediatric infectious diseases/epidemiologists
- Neonatology fellows (neonatologists in training)
- Neonatal nurses (specialty trained to care for critically ill and premature infants)
- Neonatal nurse practitioners
- Developmental specialists
- Infant and family psychologists
- Respiratory therapists
- Social workers
- Occupational, physical and speech therapists

Other pediatric subspecialists (cardiologists, endocrinologists, etc.) are also integral to meeting the health care needs of critically ill infants. The neonatal team builds strong collaborations with these subspecialists to provide multidisciplinary care to its patients and families. In addition to pediatric subspecialists, the team collaborates with maternal-fetal medicine to provide care and management of infants of mothers at risk for early or complicated deliveries.

Program Tracks

Program candidates are selected from a highly competitive pool of applicants. All levels of university students in good standing are encouraged to apply, however preference will be given to rising seniors in the premed undergraduate category.
Candidates are awarded a stipend, $1,500 for medical students and $1,000 for undergraduates. The program covers lodging and meals for an eight week period. Candidates are responsible for covering all travel costs.

There are two tracks based on level of education including a Graduate Medical Student Program and a Pre-Med Undergraduate Program.

Graduate Medical Student Track
Medical Students receive an assigned Division of Neonatal Medicine faculty/fellow mentor for basic or clinical research projects. They are exposed to a variety of pediatric shadowing experiences including neonatal intensive care and pediatric surgical subspecialty rotations.

Pre-Med Undergraduate Track
This track offers pre-medical undergraduate college students an introduction to research, patient care, and ethical issues in neonatology. This track also provides exposure to a broad spectrum of health care providers through pediatric medicine shadowing opportunities. Each student is paired with a medical student for their project.

Research
A selection of the division’s investigations include endothelial cell vascular responses in retinopathy of prematurity, drug abuse, and hypertension. Other research activities include assessment of factors that control infant immunity, role of the microbiome in health and disease, and environmental factors that impact infant outcomes and development. A selection of clinical studies include enhanced ventilator strategies, oxygen use, ligation for PDA, decreasing central line associated infections and optimizing infant nutrition.

Application Information
Please visit go.vcu.edu/jacks to download an application.

For questions or more information please contact:

- Karen Thompson-Weeks – Scholar Coordinator kweeks@mcvh-vcu.edu or 804-828-9964
- Dr. Hendricks-Muñoz – Chief, Division of Neonatal Medicine, JACK’S Summer Scholars Program Director at jackssummerscholars@gmail.com

About the VCU School of Medicine
The Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) School of Medicine is the oldest medical school in Virginia and the Commonwealth’s largest public university to provide inpatient, outpatient and emergency care.

About Children’s Hospital of Richmond at VCU (CHoR)
CHoR offers a robust continuum of pediatric services, research and education. CHoR provides the widest range of pediatric services in the region and is Central Virginia’s only full-service children’s hospital. The pediatric team at campuses and nine satellite outpatient therapy centers. CHoR provides primary, secondary, advanced tertiary and long term care to children from birth to age 21. Children’s Hospital if Richmond has 11 locations, including two main campuses and nine satellite outpatient and therapy centers.