

Patient Care & Operations

DIVISION PROFILE: CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY

The faculty of the *Vermont Center for Children, Youth, and Families* in the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry are pioneering psychiatric treatment through the development of the Vermont Family Based Approach (VFBA). The VFBA is both a clinical approach and a public health model that uses evidence-based treatments to keep well families well, protect those at risk from developing emotional and behavioral problems, and effectively treat those who experience these problems. The VFBA holds that the prevention and treatment of emotional and behavioral problems in children is achieved by focusing on the entire family.



L-R: Genevieve Williamson, MD (fellow); Masha Ivanova, PhD; Jim Hudziak, MD; Alison Richards, MD (fellow); Jeremiah Dickerson, MD; Valerie Harder, MHS, PhD; Allison Hall, MD; David Rettew, MD; Eliza Pillard (case manager), Rob Althoff, MD, PhD; and John Koutras, MD; clinical faculty and fellows not pictured: Adebawale (Debo) Mofikoaya, MD (fellow); Robert Johnston, MD (fellow); James Tallmadge, PhD; Cynthia LaRiviere, PhD; and Laura Wainer, NP

The VFBA is based on research (much of which has been conducted by the VCCYF team), showing that:

- Emotional and behavioral problems run in families.
- Genes and environment come together as both risk and protective factors for emotional and behavioral problems.
- The parents' emotional and behavioral problems can affect the family environment, putting the children's development at risk.

Beyond genes and environment, VCCYF researchers are investigating temperament, severe mood dysregulation, Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, and the dissemination of evidence-based assessment and treatment approaches to underserved populations. Refinement of psychiatric taxonomies via multicultural, neurocognitive and physiological methodologies is another important research agenda at the VCCYF.

The Division places equal emphasis on treatment, teaching and research; VCCYF faculty are expected to participate in all three, to ensure that patient care is informed by the latest empirical evidence, scholarly activities are informed by clinical realities, and the knowledge base is disseminated to trainees and junior colleagues.

“Through the Vermont Family Based Approach, we are trying to change the entire field of child psychiatry,” **James Hudziak, MD**, director of the VCCYF, says. “No one else in the country is approaching at-risk children and families using comprehensive health promotion, prevention and family based intervention.” Dr. Hudziak adds, “It is sometimes hard to explain this approach to families, particularly those who think that medication is the only way to assist a child who is struggling. Instead, we prescribe a comprehensive program that includes learning effective coping skills, regular exercise, healthy nutrition, and unplugging gadgets. These treatments can precede or substitute for the use of medications. Family health and wellness take patience and work, but they are fundamental to our society.”