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April 2011 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Tisha Wiley, Ph.D.

2010-2011 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

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My SRCD fellowship placement is at the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR), which is in the Office of the Director at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). OBSSR was established in 1995 and its mission is to advance the scientific understanding of the role of behavioral and social factors in illness and health. OBSSR is responsible for integrating behavioral and social sciences research across the 27 NIH Institutes and Centers using a variety of tools, including funding initiatives, training opportunities, conferences, workshops, and lectures.

The breadth of OBSSR's mission has provided me with opportunities to interact with people from across the NIH as well as at government agencies outside of the NIH. The last eight months at OBSSR have been an exciting, eye-opening experience and a constant exercise in broadening my horizons. I am trained as a social psychologist and much of my research before coming to the fellowship focused and the long-term effects of child abuse and neglect on children and how such children interact with legal and social service systems. I

have been able to bring a developmental and social psychological perspective to my office and to work on projects and serve on committees that are directly relevant to my expertise. However, one of the most interesting aspects of my placement is that I have been forced to step outside of my comfort zone and learn about issues and research that I had limited (if any) knowledge of before coming to OBSSR. For example, I've learned about economics, tools for analyzing and communicating complex data visually, marketing and branding, mobile health, epigenetics, genomics, translational research, and many other topics. These opportunities have been both challenging and exhilarating and have given me a new, broader perspective on science and the interface of science and policy.

At OBSSR, I have been involved in many activities and projects. Space precludes me from describing these projects in detail, however, sampling of my activities includes: drafting three funding announcements; organizing a workshop bringing behavioral and social scientists together with visualization software developers; planning a summer training institute with colleagues at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD); planning a workshop on applying marketing and branding principles to health interventions; planning a workshop on how to best utilize real-time mobile health data; planning a webinar on the use of economic measures in health care delivery evaluations; representing my office on trans-governmental committees including the Prevention Research Coordinating Committee and the Public Law 109-95 (Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries Act of 2005) Interagency Working Group; attending congressional briefings; and acting as a planning committee member on a research project lead by the National Institutes of Justice addressing teen dating violence. One of the most interesting experiences of my fellowships thus far has been witnessing the narrowly averted government shutdown in early April, 2011 and learning how an actual shutdown would have affected many, many aspects of government functioning. These experiences have helped me develop a more nuanced understanding of how the political and policy context influences agencies and how this trickles down to influence individuals and communities outside of government.

In addition to what I've learned through my work at OBSSR, I've also had opportunities through the fellowship to access an impressive array of mentors and professional development activities. I plan to stay at OBSSR for a second year and am excited to have the opportunity to learn even more over the course of the next year and a half. I'm not sure what the next step in my career will be, but know that my career path and perspective have been forever changed by this amazing experience in ways that will inevitably make me better able to work to serve children and families at the intersection of science, policy, and practice. I am deeply grateful to SRCD for providing me this unique and amazing opportunity.