

D.L. Hart Memorial Outcomes Research Grant

Program Details

Purpose

Focus on Therapeutic Outcomes, Inc. (FOTO) invites applications for the D.L. Hart Memorial Outcomes Research Grant. FOTO is seeking proposals that will lead to improvements in quality of care for patients with musculoskeletal or neurological conditions who are referred to clinical rehabilitation services e.g., physical, occupational, or speech therapy. Specifically, FOTO will consider research proposals that address one or more of the following five priority areas:

1. **Observational Studies** including Practice-Based Evidence (PBE) research designs to identify associations between rehabilitation processes of care, controlling for patient risk factors, and patient reported functional outcomes or healthcare costs.
2. Advancement of **risk adjustment** methods to control for potential confounders and enhance meaningful clinical interpretation of patient outcomes.
3. Advancement of **patient subgrouping classification methods** to improve patient care management and outcomes.
4. Advancement of Pay for Performance (P4P) or other **value-based payment models** that are based on functional change and efficiency measures.
5. Integration of **patient reported outcome (PRO)** measures assessing functional status and health related quality of life during routine clinical practice to assess quality improvement and/or optimize clinical effectiveness.

Background for Research Priorities

1. Observational Studies

Sound rigorous methods are needed for use by researchers and providers evaluating practical questions regarding risks, benefits, and costs of interventions as they occur in routine clinical rehabilitation practice.

Practice-based evidence (PBE) is prioritized due to being a comprehensive observational research approach designed to decrease the biases generally associated with traditional observational research. Main features of PBE include: (1) attention to patient characteristics to address confounders; (2) use of large samples and diverse sources of patients to improve sample representativeness, power, and external validity; (3) inclusion of front-line clinicians in the design and execution of research to improve ecological validity; and (4) use of detailed and standardized documentation of interventions and training and quality control checks in order to reliably assess processes of care.

Examples of specific research questions considered responsive to this priority include, but are not limited to, the following:

- For patients with prevalent types of musculoskeletal impairments, treated in outpatient community based rehabilitation settings, what processes of care are associated with improvements in self-reported functional outcomes?
- For patients with low back pain, what referral patterns and processes of care are associated with the greatest improvements in self-reported functional outcomes and lowest downstream healthcare costs?
- For patients with cervical impairments, how do types and processes of interventions and risk adjusted outcomes compare in different rehabilitation settings?

2. Risk Adjustment

It is critical to adjust for differences among patients when evaluating quality of care using patient outcomes because differences in patient outcomes are associated with type and severity of impairments, as well as other factors. Without appropriate adjustment for risk factors, outcomes cannot be meaningfully interpreted nor attributed to therapeutic interventions. Risk adjustment for case-mix is particularly important when treatment groups are self-selected rather than randomized.

Research proposals addressing this priority area should use sufficiently large data sources to examine factors associated with the outcomes of care. FOTO is particularly interested in novel research to advance and expand on work that has already been conducted in this area.

Examples of research questions considered responsive to this priority include, but are not limited to the following:

- What is the relative contribution of patient-related factors such as socioeconomic, educational level, language, culture, and self-efficacy to comprehensive models predicting discharge functional status after physical therapy treatment?
- How do risk factors for functional status vary across types of patient impairments and conditions, and/or settings?
- What factors can be used to risk-adjust for service utilization? How do these factors vary across patient impairments, conditions, and/or settings?
- How does risk adjustment impact evaluations of provider performance?

3. Patient Subgrouping Classification

Classification of patients with musculoskeletal impairments into homogeneous treatment subgroups can inform treatment decisions, improve quality of care and patient outcomes, and reduce healthcare utilization and costs. For instance, recent studies on low back pain indicate that treating patients with LBP using a treatment-based classification system can result in better patient outcomes and less health care costs.

Additional research is required to compare established classification paradigms models and treatment approaches to alternative classification systems. Research also is needed to evaluate the potential of including psychosocial, socioeconomic, and physical impairment factors in classification systems.

Examples of research questions considered responsive to this priority include, but are not limited to the following:

- For patients with spinal impairment, what classification systems effectively direct treatment that maximizes effectiveness and minimizes costs?
- What is the contribution of incorporating biological, psychological, and social patient-related factors to comprehensive classification models to improve patient outcomes and reduce downstream health care costs?
- How do different treatment classification systems compare with respect to patient outcomes of patients with musculoskeletal impairments?

4. Value-Based Payment Models

In today's healthcare environment, there is growing emphasis on value-based payment models including pay-for-performance programs.

Additional research needs to build upon work evaluating value-based payment models and to compare alternative models and approaches.

Examples of research questions considered responsive to this priority include, but are not limited to the following:

- What is the validity of P4P or other value-based payment models that utilize functional status and efficiency measures? Are these models able to differentiate value-based care?
- What is the impact of risk adjustment on value-based payment models that categorize provider quality?
- What is the impact of implementing value-based payment models programs on patient outcomes and service utilization?

5. Integration of Patient Reported Outcome (PRO) Measures in Routine Clinical Practice

There has been increased interest in the assessment of PROs in outpatient rehabilitation practice. Such measures can efficiently capture the patient's opinion or experience and can be used to document changes in a patient's functional status over the course of treatment. FOTO is very interested in studies that examine how clinicians can use data from PROs to enhance the effectiveness of treatment and value of care to patients.

Examples of research questions considered responsive to this priority include, but are not limited to the following:

- How do scores on PROs of patients with complex situations (on disability, elevated distress, medical complexity) compare to those without such factors?
- Do PRO items function similarly across age groups in those who have musculoskeletal impairments?
- For a given functional status measure, can multiple thresholds be estimated and combined to suggest a reasonable range of score changes that indicate meaningful change.
- What is the impact of a standardized protocol for discussing with patients the results of their functional outcome scores.

Priority

Priority will be given to applications that propose use of FOTO data. The FOTO database is a rich reservoir of meaningful data. Grant applicants are strongly encouraged to consider the use of FOTO data in designing their studies.

Also encouraged are applications that include a physical, occupational, or speech therapist on the investigator team (either as principal- or co-investigator).

Grant Guidelines

Application

To apply, please complete the [required grant application](#) and submit all required materials outlined in the grant document. The PI must provide letter(s) of support from institution(s), participating clinic(s), and/or consultants if applicable. If the project requires programming work performed by FOTO, the PI must obtain a letter of support from FOTO. Proposals will be subjected to a peer-review process. Only the highest quality projects will be eligible to receive funding.

Eligibility

1. The grant should clearly address one or more of the five research priority areas described above.
2. Individuals are encouraged to network with other clinicians and researchers to develop and complete projects at single or multi-clinic sites.
3. Members of FOTO's Research Advisory Board may apply for a D.L. Hart Memorial Outcomes Research Grant as PI, or participate as a coauthor or consultant; however that applicant may not participate in the review or selection process.

Funding

A maximum of \$10,000 can be requested. Grants are awarded for 2 years.

Funding Agreement

1. All applicants receiving an award for a research grant are required to submit annual reports to FOTO.
 - a. Annual reports are due by May 31st at the completion of each grant year.
 - b. All funds are distributed at the beginning of the project period.
 - c. If the PI fails to submit an annual report six (6) months past the due date **or** fails to implement the proposed project six (6) months past the start date, FOTO will request the PI to immediately return all funds distributed by FOTO to FOTO.
2. The PI will initiate all correspondence with FOTO.
3. All work must be completed within two (2) years of receiving the funding.
4. The PI will prepare and submit a manuscript for publication in a peer-reviewed journal within 4 months following project completion. The PI will also:
 - Submit a poster or platform presentation for an appropriate national or international conference
 - Allow the proposal abstract to be published on FOTO's website.
5. Focus on Therapeutic Outcomes (FOTO) will be cited in all publications and presentations.

Grant Timeline

May:

A call for proposals will be posted on various websites i.e. FOTO, the Health Policy and Administration Section of the American Physical Therapy Association, the Education Section of the American Physical Therapy Association and the Canadian Physiotherapy Association. FOTO will email a call for proposals to educational programs in the United States of America and Canada.

October 1st:

FOTO is offering an ***optional*** service to screen potential research applications. Primary investigators are encouraged to submit an abstract of their study (1 page) for an initial screening by a member of FOTO's Research Advisory Committee (FRAB). To be considered for an early screening, an abstract of the study (1 page) must be received by October 1st. Abstracts should be submitted to Mark Werneke at mwerneke@fotoinc.com.

October 15th:

If the PI chose to submit an abstract for screening purposes by October 1st, the PI will receive notice that either 1) the study is of interest to FOTO and the PI is encouraged to submit a complete grant application by the January 10th deadline or 2) the PI will be advised not to submit the study for consideration of the D.L. Hart Memorial Outcomes Research Grant.

January 10, at 5pm EST:

The funding is one funding cycle per year. The **deadline** for grant applications in the upcoming cycle is January 10th by 5 PM. Late submissions will be returned without review.

January 24th:

Applicants will be notified of rejection of application if the grant application does not pass the initial screen.

February 1st:

Applicants will receive electronic notification that the proposal adhered to submission guidelines and was referred on to the peer-review process.

May 15th:

Applicants will be notified of their funding award status by May 15th.

May 29th:

Applicants receiving funding must notify FRAB chairperson of acceptance of funds by May 29th. All awarded applicants must provide evidence of project approval by an Ethical Review Board before funds are dispersed.

May 31st:

Annual reports are due by May 31st at the completion of each grant year.

June 1st:

Earliest project start date is June 1st.

June 30th:

Revised proposal due: If a grant proposal is returned to the applicant after the peer review process with a request for revisions, the applicant must submit a summary of how each of the suggested changes has been addressed.

July 30th:

Applicant will be notified regarding FOTO's decision to fund the revised grant proposal.

Review Process

Step 1. Initial Screening

All grant applications will receive an initial screening by member(s) of the FRAB. The initial screen determines if the study addresses one or more of the five research priorities outlined above and the research project is of interest for advancing FOTO's mission to publish high quality research

Reasons for rejection without further consideration:

- Incomplete or late submissions after Jan 10th deadline
- Submissions that do not adhere to the grant application instructions
- Requests for funds for more than \$10,000
- Projects that are not related to the specific FOTO priority areas outlined in the Program Details.
- Failure to provide letter(s) of support if applicable.

Grant applications which are accepted after initial screening will be forwarded onto FOTO's peer review process.

Step 2. Peer Review Process

Applications will be scored based on the grant proposal's scientific merit with respect to the following criteria:

- *Significance* – the extent to which the research project could make an original and important contribution to the body of evidence related to the specific FOTO objectives outlined in the Program Details.
- *Research design* – the extent to which the conceptual framework, design, methods, and analyses are properly developed, well integrated, and appropriate to the specific aims of the project.
- *Feasibility* – the likelihood that the proposed research project can be completed by the investigators given their experience, expertise, and resources.
- *Budget* – The degree to which: (1) the proposed budget is proportionate to the proposed work, (2) the proposed expenses are justified by the scientific aims.

Step 3: FRAB Recommendation

During the annual FOTO's Research Advisory Board (FRAB) meeting, the members of FRAB will review the findings of the Peer Review Committee and make a recommendation to FOTO. The FOTO Executive team will consider FRAB recommendations when making the final funding decision.

Step 4: Notification of Grant Award

Applicants will be notified of their funding award status within 30 days of the Board meeting or by **May 15th**. Applicants receiving funding must notify FRAB chairperson of acceptance of funds within 14 days. All awarded applicants must provide evidence of project approval by an Ethical Review Board before funds are dispersed.

Step 5: Grant Revisions

If applicable, some applications may be funded contingent on successful revision as per FRAB recommendations. If a grant proposal is returned to the applicant after the peer review process with a request for revisions, the PI must submit a summary of how each of the suggested changes has been addressed in the revised proposal by **June 30th**. All changes should be highlighted in the revised submission. Only one re-submission will be allowed. The original review committee members will review revised applications. The PI will be notified by **July 30th** regarding FOTO's decision regarding funding of the revised grant proposal.

Disclaimer

PIs submitting applications do so with the understanding that they are expected to abide by the conditions, deadline policies, and decisions of FOTO. FOTO reserves the right to change the amount of any award at its sole discretion. FOTO makes no guarantee that requested grants will be awarded or that proposals recommended for funding will be funded in full. If there are no acceptable projects for any grant year, no grant monies will be dispensed.

Contact Information

Questions regarding the application process can be directed to Mark Werneke at mwerneke@fotoinc.com.