



## **Postdoctoral Fellowship in Patient-engaged Health Research and Novel Clinical Trials**

### **Postdoctoral Position with the Scleroderma Patient-centered Intervention Network**

Dr. Brett Thombs ([www.thombsresearchteam.ca/](http://www.thombsresearchteam.ca/)) of McGill University and the Scleroderma Patient-centered Intervention Network (SPIN; [www.spinsclero.com](http://www.spinsclero.com)), in partnership with Scleroderma Canada ([www.scleroderma.ca](http://www.scleroderma.ca)), is seeking a postdoctoral fellow to be trained in a patient-engaged research program. The fellow will receive training in the design and conduct of observational studies and novel international trials of patient-centered interventions in a rare disease context and will have a high level of direct patient participant interaction. This is a two-year position supported by the Mitacs fellowship program ([www.mitacs.ca/en](http://www.mitacs.ca/en)).

**Background:** Scleroderma is a rare autoimmune connective tissue disease that causes significant disability and disfigurement. SPIN was created to bring together people living with scleroderma, health professionals, and scleroderma researchers from around the world to develop, test, and disseminate accessible support tools for people with scleroderma, including self-management, rehabilitation, psychological, and educational tools. Rare conditions like scleroderma are often under-studied, and patients usually have few or no tested support options, including the kind of support programs that are typically available to people with more common conditions. One reason for this is that the small number of patients with any given rare disease is a barrier to effectively developing, testing, and disseminating such programs. SPIN has addressed these barriers by (1) fostering a high level of patient and community engagement in all aspects of its research; (2) adapting well-tested patient support strategies from other chronic diseases to meet the needs of people with scleroderma and delivering them via the internet to increase accessibility; and (3) utilizing novel trial designs (e.g., cmRCT, partially nested designs) to conduct large, efficient, trials in a resource-starved rare disease environment. SPIN is currently engaged in three trials of internet-based interventions, all funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

**Role:** The postdoctoral fellow will lead or assist with multiple ongoing projects:

- (1) The fellow will have the opportunity to lead patient-oriented observational research using data from SPIN's ongoing cohort of > 1,800 scleroderma patients. Projects could include work on decision aids to support difficult health care decisions, psychological aspects of living with scleroderma, oral health, or other aspects of living with scleroderma of interest to the fellow.
- (2) The fellow will be involved in a novel RCT of the SPIN-SSLED Program, which is a videoconference-based training program for patient leaders of scleroderma support groups. The SPIN-SSLED Program aims to improve support group leader efficacy and, thus, to increase the effectiveness of existing support groups, reduce burden on support group leaders, and increase the availability of support groups.
- (3) The postdoctoral fellow may also assist with the design and oversight of clinical trials for other interventions, including online programs that address body image concerns due to disease-related disfigurement, coping with emotional distress resulting from scleroderma, and physical activity support for scleroderma patients.

**Training Opportunities:** Trainees with Dr. Thombs take on significant responsibility and have published extensively. In the last 5 years, trainees under Dr. Thombs' supervision have first-authored approximately 65 peer-reviewed articles and have co-authored articles more than 150 times (for details, see <https://bit.ly/2MHcACT>). The postdoctoral fellow will gain experience in the design and management of large international trials, data analysis, manuscript development (including first-authored publications), dissemination of results via national and international conferences, grant writing, and mentoring of students and staff. The postdoctoral fellow will have the opportunity to learn cutting-edge techniques for large-scale non-pharmacological trials. Dr. Thombs, along with SPIN Co-Director Dr. Linda Kwakkenbos, currently lead a CIHR-funded international team that is developing a CONSORT extension for reporting of clinical trials using cohorts and routinely-collected data (<https://bit.ly/2lEX9JV>).

As a patient-centered initiative, SPIN collaborates closely with individuals with scleroderma and patient organizations through all stages of research. As such, the fellow will receive training in the areas of patient engagement and research designed in partnership with patients, which will directly impact support and quality of life outcomes for people with a devastating rare disease.

SPIN is an international collaboration of over 150 members, including patients, patient organizations, researchers, and health care providers from 7 countries (Canada, USA, UK, France, Spain, Australia, Mexico) that is directed by Dr. Thombs. SPIN actively partners with >20 Canadian and international patient organizations and maintains a cohort of >1,800 patients from >40 recruiting sites. The postdoctoral fellow will interact with SPIN's international multidisciplinary team, which includes psychologists, rheumatologists, methodologists, and patient research partners from around the world. Dr. Thombs is affiliated with the McGill's Departments of Psychiatry, Psychology, and Epidemiology, and the fellow will have the opportunity to participate in training activities, including seminars, in these departments and at the Jewish General Hospital.

**Eligibility:** Applicants should have a recent doctoral degree in a health-related field, such as psychology, public health, or epidemiology. The doctoral degree should be obtained by the date of hire.

**Salary:** \$50,000

**Location:** The postdoctoral fellow will work primarily at McGill University and the Jewish General Hospital in Montréal, Québec.

**Start Date:** Start date is flexible, and applications will be considered on a rolling basis.

**To apply:** Applicants should send (1) a cover letter explaining their interest in the fellowship and how working in this position would support their career goals, (2) a curriculum vitae, (3) an unofficial transcript, (4) reprints or preprints of published articles or submitted manuscripts, and (5) contact information for three references to Ms. Marie-Eve Carrier ([carrier.marie.eve@gmail.com](mailto:carrier.marie.eve@gmail.com)).