

## **Patient-centered Research to Address Chronic Health Issues**

After completing her doctorate in behavioral neuroscience at the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL) in 2012, Jodi Woodruff joined the Missouri Institute of Mental Health (MIMH) where she now works as research assistant professor.

At MIMH, Woodruff and her team study the effect chronic health conditions like diabetes and HIV have on the brain, the mental health of those with chronic illness, and the role of the immune system in affected individuals' health. Additionally, they explore what part cognitive function and processes play in the health of those with chronic diseases. Woodruff also looks at what healthcare system processes are needed to reduce the incidence of chronic diseases and better promote healthy living.

Woodruff has been involved for nearly a decade in a state-funded initiative that provides integrative care for individuals with chronic or mental health conditions or a substance-use disorder. Health Homes is a collaboration with the Missouri Behavioral Health Council, Missouri Primary Care Association, and Missouri HealthNet. Woodruff and her team evaluate practices used to treat patients affected by chronic disease, conduct research using “big data” sources, and provides training for healthcare professionals who directly respond to the needs of those involved in the program.

Given the difficulty of tracking health outcomes over short time periods, Woodruff finds her work with this dedicated group of collaborators highly rewarding. Not only does Health Homes allow individuals with chronic disease access to the care they need and the ability to learn to better manage their health conditions, it provides Woodruff with years of data on how person-centered chronic disease management positively affects health outcomes. In response to the needs of the program, Woodruff and her team created an online information hub for healthcare professionals that provides person-centered tools to help them better connect with patients, along with training and other resources.

Woodruff's research activities are applicable across many disciplines, not just a focus on community-based care settings. She sees the opportunity for collaborations in behavioral health, chemistry, economics, social work, nursing, and computer science – wherever people are working together to improve the health of a community. To learn more about Woodruff's work and to connect with her, please visit her page on the MIMH website at <https://www.mimh.edu/people/heaps-jodi-m/>.

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