[music] And I think research does a great job at taking a certain situation or a certain question and breaking it down so that you can actually better your practice as a clinician.

Welcome to our podcast series, My Life as a Research Assistant. This series is brought to you by Kessler Foundation. Where we are changing the lives of people with disabilities. I'm your host, editor, and producer Joan Banks-Smith, creative producer for Kessler Foundation. Research assistants are on the frontlines of our research studies collecting data, conducting interviews, testing subjects, and are the face of Kessler Foundation to our research study participants. In 2020 Kessler Foundation was ranked among one of the best nonprofits to work for and best places to work in New Jersey. Throughout this series, we'll meet up with research assistants from our mobility, spinal cord injury, stroke, traumatic brain injury, and neuroscience, and neuropsychology centers who have been with the Foundation for over a year. And some that are now senior research assistants, nurses, MD, MS candidates, postdocs, and those that have entered into many more professions. This is another episode of My Life as a Research Assistant. We'd like to welcome Gabriel Felix. Gabriel was a research assistant in 2013 to 2015 in our TBI lab. He has come back, is working in our HPE lab which is Human Performance and Engineering. Currently, Gabriel is a second-year med student at Howard University in Washington DC who is studying physical medicine and rehabilitation and also research. And hopes to continue his studies in traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injury. His undergraduate degree was in psychology from Binghamton University. So welcome back Gabriel. It's been a year since we last saw you.

Yes it has.

And it's great having you back to see the progression of our research assistants and how they're moving on in their chosen fields. The type of work that you are doing now obviously is much different than when you were here in 2015. Can you tell us a little bit about the work that you're currently doing in the Human Performance and Engineering lab?

Well now I'm currently helping out with two of their studies. One has to do with functional stimulation and the other one has to do with TBI in virtual reality. So I'm helping out with that. I'm assisting in terms of helping the patients in contact guarding, helping with some of the data, and doing other things as they are giving me more work to do.

And when you were here in 2013 to 2015, you were in the Traumatic Brain Injury lab. And what type of work did you do there?

Well I did a lot of different things during that time. It utilized more of my psychology background so it was more cognitive-based stuff. So we had a sleep study. We had our model systems which is a big project that's a longitudinal study. And we also did
other questionnaires like quality of life, things that required neuropsychological testing.

BANKS-SMITH: 03:15 Throughout that time, are there any particular participants that stood out?

FELIX: 03:19 Well with the TBI population I feel like every single one of them sticks out. It's a great population to work with. You get to learn a lot because you can see different spectrum of deficits. I really can't say that one stood out because they've all been pretty great to work. And each personality I can just think of all at once.

BANKS-SMITH: 03:41 Working with participants, has that helped shaped or influenced moving forward in your academic pursuits?

FELIX: 03:49 Working with participants, definitely. It was really good in terms of, I guess, learning to interact in a clinical aspect. More so in the things that you do in undergrad, you're just basically working with books, writing, things like that by your lonesome. But when you actually get to meet these people and hear their stories it really impacts you in a positive way and you really learn how the world is a small place.

BANKS-SMITH: 04:16 The research participants, if I were thinking about becoming one or I were a caregiver and wanted-- or I had hoped a family member could be a participant, what do I need to do?

FELIX: 04:27 We have a lot of our studies, I guess, marketed in different ways. So you can go to clinical trials at gov to get more information. You can go on the Kessler Foundation website. We also have our Facebook. So we use a lot of different avenues in order to reach people. So all you would have to do is send an email and you should get a response in a timely fashion.

BANKS-SMITH: 04:49 And why is it important that we help out in research, whether you’re a healthy control or not a healthy control?

FELIX: 04:54 Well I think one thing that research does is that it helps us to answer a lot of questions that come up in a clinical perspective. So generally as I’m learning as a future clinician there are things that you would think would be obvious and certain things that you see but you don’t necessarily know why exactly. And I think research does a great job at taking a certain situation or a certain question and breaking it down so that you can actually better your practice as a clinician.

BANKS-SMITH: 05:23 Is there anything that stands out in your mind with the type of research that you've been doing that just even makes you more passionate about what you're doing?

FELIX: 05:31 I think just the overall experience. One thing that just in my TBI experience, I worked on some sleep studies and I realized how such a simple thing as sleep, something that we take for granted, something that even me as a med student I lack very often, can really impact your life as a whole. If you become very tired, irritable, you're not as quick as you would want to be. And I think doing that and especially working with that population it's really made me appreciate just the small things in life. And I think that that's something I want to stress for my future patients.

BANKS-SMITH: 06:08 Definitely. Any parting words?
Gabriel Felix on Learning to Interact in a Clinical Setting

FELIX: 06:11 Well, it's great to be back. I'm learning even more and I'm going to use this experience in my future career. So I'm very excited to be back.

BANKS-SMITH: 06:20 Thank you for all the work that you do at Kessler Foundation, we appreciate it and wish you the very best as you move forward in your career. [music]

FELIX: 06:26 Thank you.

BANKS-SMITH: 06:27 To learn more about career opportunities at Kessler Foundation be sure and check out the program notes for links. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Listen to us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, SoundCloud, or wherever you get your podcasts. This podcast was recorded during the summer of 2016 and was edited and produced by Joan-Banks Smith, creative producer for Kessler Foundation.