

Michele Barry on the Importance of Recruiting Research Participants with and without Disabilities

*** Originally recorded on June 9, 2016, updated September 8, 2020.*** [Listen to it here.](#)

- MICHELE BARRY: 00:07 [music] For both healthy control and unhealthy control, if we don't have them, we have no research. We can't do any research without participants.
- JOAN BANKS-SMITH: 00:19 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. In this episode, I met up with Michele Barry, a former research assistant and research coordinator in our Center for Stroke Rehabilitation Research. She is now a project manager at Mount Sinai Health System in northern New Jersey. Welcome, Michele.
- BARRY: 01:38 Thank you.
- BANKS-SMITH: 01:39 Glad you were able to stop by. What brought you to Kessler Foundation?
- BARRY: 01:43 In my time at Seton Hall, one of our research scientist Dr. Peggy Chen, she came and gave a talk to me and my fellow students. And she talked about her research, specifically in spatial neglect. And I just found it super interesting and something I wanted to get involved in. So I asked if I could be an intern for her. So I interned with her for about a semester, I believe, and then a job opening became available.
- BANKS-SMITH: 02:14 What exactly do you do?
- BARRY: 02:15 As a research assistant - me, personally - I work on three separate studies. So for each of those studies, I work with recruiting patients whether they're inpatient or outpatients, getting them interested in the study, telling them about the study, and then actually conducting the study with them doing different neurological assessments or whatever that study needs, I do that with the patient. And that can be either while they're here as an inpatient, if they're here for outpatient therapy, I go and visit them wherever they're doing outpatient therapy, and I can also go to their home if they're more homebound, take all that data that I get and input it into various databases so that we can then use that data.
- BANKS-SMITH: 03:06 During the stroke lab, do you primarily work with spatial neglect?
- BARRY: 03:09 Yes. And then also, I am involved in a reading study where we look at people who have suffered a left side hemisphere stroke and assess what reading deficits, if any, they have as a result of their stroke. Oftentimes they have aphasia or something like that. And then I also do a medication management study where we look at stroke.

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And actually, we look at TBI patients as well to see how they adhere to their medication schedule and how being aware of any cognitive deficits they have affects how they take their medication.

BANKS-SMITH: 03:43

So somebody that has had a stroke and has aphasia, what is aphasia?

BARRY: 03:48

In general, aphasia is an inability to communicate verbally. Either they have trouble accessing the words that they're trying to come up with, and it kind of comes out as a jumble of words if they can come up with words, or they just cannot access the part of their brain that the words that they want to say, they can't come out.

BANKS-SMITH: 04:12

So basically, they have the ability to think about the word. They just can't get it to come out.

BARRY: 04:16

Yes. Yes.

BANKS-SMITH: 04:18

Why is it so important to become a research participant, whether you're a healthy control or an unhealthy control?

BARRY: 04:23

Well, for both healthy control and unhealthy control, if we don't have them, we have no research. We can't do any research without participants. Especially for these studies that we have conducting now, we're enrolling non-healthy participants who have suffered a stroke. It's very important to have multiple, multiple people with different types of strokes because everyone's stroke is different. It's in a different region of the brain. They have different resulting symptoms from it and deficits. So it's important to have multiple participants so we can really see what certain areas of the brain correlate to with behavior and just to get as much data as possible.

BANKS-SMITH: 05:06

Michele, if I were thinking about becoming a research participant and just didn't know what to expect, what could I expect?

BARRY: 05:15

Well, for each study, it's obviously different. But I would explain to you what assessments I would do with you, whether it's a memory assessment or a mood assessment or whatever. I would explain how long they would take, if any of them might be frustrating, and then we could move from there to see if that was something that you were further interested in pursuing.

BANKS-SMITH: 05:40

And anybody that wants to become a research participant, if you go to our website kesslerfoundation.org, you can sign up to become a research participant, and somebody will get in touch with you. Before we end the show, are there any parting thoughts you'd like to share with us?

BARRY: 05:56

Something that I've really learned and gained from working here at Kessler Foundation is-- well, working with humans in my schooling at Seton Hall, most of my research and my thesis was done using animals, rats. After I started doing that, I started working here and working with humans, and I realized that I much prefer working with humans and creating relationships with participants and just getting to know them and, hopefully, helping them in some way.

BANKS-SMITH: 06:27

Well, it does make a big difference when you can actually speak to somebody.

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- BARRY: 06:30 Yes, and they can speak back. Yes. It's a great feeling to, hopefully, help people.
[music]
- BANKS-SMITH: 06:35 Well, thank you very much for being on our show.
- BARRY: 06:36 Thank you for having me.
- BANKS-SMITH: 06:40 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.