

The Abelson/Curtis Legacy Fund

Supporting the clinical, educational, and scientific excellence of the U-M Anxiety Disorders Program



George Curtis, M.D., joined the U-M Department of Psychiatry in 1972, helping advance the anxiety field through an innovative clinical and research program using exposure therapy to treat and study phobic fear. With Ollie Cameron, M.D., Randy Nesse, M.D., Bruce Thyer, MSW, Ph.D., and Joe Himle, MSW, Ph.D., he made major contributions to the neuroscientific study of fear and created a unique treatment team, seamlessly integrating science, psychotherapy, and psychopharmacology. In 1978, the Anxiety Disorders Treatment Clinic was created. Unique in its approach, it was the third anxiety program in the U.S. With innovative, team-oriented social workers, Dr. Curtis built a cutting-edge cognitive behavioral therapy treatment and training program. They pioneered training nurse practitioners to be experts in psychological and pharmacological therapies for anxiety — an enduring example of

his visionary leadership and interdisciplinary approach. They brought empirically proven anxiety treatments to the state for the first time, which they shared broadly through educational outreach. Dr. Curtis helped shape the nascent field of biological psychiatry through his research, publications, and promotion of an integrated psychobiological approach to clinical care, shaping the clinic's foundation as it exists today.



Jim Abelson, M.D., Ph.D., came to U-M in 1980 as a medical student. His Ph.D. in clinical psychology led him to seek out Dr. Curtis in 1981, and together

they developed a med-student summer research project. Dr. Abelson stayed connected to the program through medical school and residency. He became a clinic fellow in 1989, joined U-M's faculty in 1990, and assumed program leadership in 1996. As a psychologist and psychiatrist, he was drawn to the clinic's foundational integration of psychology, medication, and neurobiology to accommodate each patient's needs and strengths. In 1997, he hired the clinic's first full-time psychologist, Shelly Van Etten-Lee, Ph.D., supplementing an already strong cadre of

social workers and their trainees. Today, there are seven Ph.D. clinical psychologists, three psychiatrists, and three social workers contributing to the program's research, education, and clinical care. His passion for training the next generation of skilled clinicians, scientists, and educators is central to his legacy. He continued the clinic tradition of Drs. Curtis and Himle to actively share best-practice treatments to the community for regional and national impact. Inspired by Dr. Nesse, who helped our residency training program become one of the nation's best, he created a six-month anxiety clinic rotation for PGY3 residents, which quickly became a highly coveted training opportunity. Since 1996, over 150 residents have received state-of-the-art, interdisciplinary training under Dr. Abelson, along with 23 psychology fellows, 21 social work fellows, and 10 psychology practicum students. The MSW Fellowship has helped ensure that well-trained, empirically grounded cognitive behavioral therapists specializing in anxiety populate our region today.

Dr. Abelson's deep caring and passion for helping people grow has led to numerous mentoring awards and a treasured collection of resident evaluations, universally giving his supervision the highest praise and most loving accolades. Knowing he has positively influenced a generation of mental health experts, now across the country, is his most meaningful legacy. His nurturant ability to help trainees embrace strengths is complemented by his gentle approach to addressing weaknesses, striving to empower, never diminish. He



brings this philosophy to all he does as clinic director, helping forge a stellar team of clinicians, scientists, and educators dedicated to improving the lives of people struggling with anxiety disorders.



Sarah Bommarito, M.D., has long been focused on helping people in need and brings her passion for helping others, and her expertise in anxiety disorders and professional wellness, to her role as new director of the U-M Anxiety Clinic. Her passion and expertise have grown tremendously during training rotations in the clinic and years as its Assistant Director. She is known for her commitment to inclusivity and interdisciplinarity. She defines her professional ideology as “the integrated use of psychological, pharmacological, and neurobiological knowledge to help people recover, grow, and thrive.” Her M.D. is from Wayne State University. Her undergraduate years and psychiatric residency were spent here at UM. We are thrilled to welcome her to her as director of the U-M Anxiety Clinic and look forward to her many future accomplishments.

“I will endeavor to maintain the legacy I’ve come to know in this clinic— recognizing the unique contributions every team member brings to our work and empowering all to grow toward their full potential, while steadily improving our collective knowledge and skills, to provide the highest quality care in the state to patients with anxiety disorders.”

HONORING THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

As Dr. Abelson steps down as Anxiety Program director, he wishes to help the clinic’s third director, Sarah Bommarito, M.D., launch her leadership career with a legacy fund, mirroring the one bequeathed to him when he became the program’s second director. This fund will entwine the Abelson and Curtis names in a lasting way to support the clinic’s ongoing educational missions. Dr. Abelson is asking all program alumni, faculty colleagues, staff, patients, families, and friends to join him to help continue the program’s national prominence in developing and disseminating neurobiologically grounded, empirically proven, individually tailored, optimally effective treatments for anxiety and stress disorders. Dr. Abelson has sustained and enhanced the stature and reach of the pioneering program Dr. Curtis began more than 45 years ago. Now he hopes to ensure it has the resources needed to remain at the forefront of care in an increasingly complex and challenging care delivery environment.

To honor their inspiring leadership, we ask you to help us create a legacy fund in their names, to support continuous education for faculty and staff, seed innovative and clinically relevant research ideas, help procure state-of-the-art technology for training and treatment, and more. Help us reach our \$100,000 goal to create an endowed legacy fund that will keep us on the national forefront of the anxiety field, as the country’s first anxiety clinic that fully integrated psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, and neuroscience to better treat anxiety disorders and optimally train the next generation of providers. Future directors of the program will manage the fund, carrying on its historical commitment to using the tools of modern neuroscience and intervention research to continuously increase the efficacy and efficiency of clinical care, addressing the clinical and educational needs of our region while maintaining national leadership as a clinical and scientific center of excellence.

Our fundraising goal is \$100,000. A gift to the Abelson/Curtis Legacy Fund (702673) constitutes a gift for endowment and distributions from it shall be made in accordance with the University’s then-existing endowment distribution policy and used as provided in the documents establishing the Fund, including any amendments. If we do not meet the \$100,000 collective fundraising goal, the Fund will become an expendable fund, the full principal made available to support the Anxiety Program.

Contribute online at victors.us/abelsoncurtislegacyfund
or contact Courtney Metzger at 248-867-2644 or coucarr@umich.edu.