

URBAN HEALTH SCHOLARS

2019-2020



Our mission is to prepare medical students to become effective care providers to urban medically underserved populations.

UHS Class of 2023

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UHS Class of 2022

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BOSTON TRIP 2019

(Sept. 6-8)

Meeting with Dr. Anu Kaul at Mattapan Community Health Center

On September 5th the Urban Health Scholars group from the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth went to the Mattapan Community Health Center and met with Dr. Anu Kaul. Dr. Kaul gave the group a brief overview of services the center provides including primary care appointments and connection to social workers. A question and answer session followed the overview. Dr. Kaul discussed how the center has been able to increase the community's access to healthcare resulting in a reduction in emergency room visits for the residents of Mattapan. He discussed how the increased insurance coverage provided by the ACA has led to greater financial stability of the health center allowing the center to increase to the scope of services it provides. Visiting the Mattapan Community Health Center was a positive way to begin the group's trip to Boston.

Boston Healthcare for the Homeless

The tour of Boston Healthcare for the Homeless (BHCHP) was definitely one of its kind. The immediate sentiment of compassion, love, and overall drive to serve the displaced patient population was evident upon entering the doors of the facility. The UHS team was constantly amazed at the work that was being done at BHCHP throughout the tour. From the SPOT room, which allowed for a safe, and nonjudgmental room staffed by providers to monitor patients who were at risk of overdose, to the atrium floor, which fostered a sense of community and independence for inpatient individuals, the center displayed a genuine and intentional model that sought to serve the needs of the patient population as best as possible.

The facility is conveniently located between the largest men's and women's shelters in Boston and Boston Medical Center. It is both the physical and metaphorical bridge between the shelter and the healthcare system for those they serve. The unique challenges faced by the displaced patient population are continuously shifting and the solutions in place are simultaneously reflecting them, as demonstrated by the types of outreach provided by BHCHP. The tour of BHCHP was an eye-opening experience highlighting the services that could, and should, be offered in all urban settings.



Racism and Health Training at Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center

While in Boston, the UHS had an amazing opportunity to take part in a racial justice and public health training. One of the first topics addressed was the difference between equity and equality. Disparity, which confers with inequality, relates to differences between groups, where inequity acknowledges the unavoidable differences between groups that are unjust and aims to level the field. One example is the frequency of asthma ED visits of children broken down by neighborhoods in Boston—Mattapan, Dorchester, and Roxbury have significantly higher rates of ED visits than other neighborhoods, which is deeply rooted in a housing inequity from historical, and perpetuated, red lining. These neighborhoods are predominantly Black, and are furthest from the major hospitals in Boston.

Another big issue in racial health inequity is maternal mortality. While the US has some of the worst maternal mortality rates, it is dramatically increased for Black women, even when controlling for socioeconomic factors. The major takeaway from these examples is that racism (along with other inequities like classism, sexism, heterosexism) inform social determinants of health, affecting health outcomes. This training was hugely informative, and importantly ended with us reflecting on ways of self care, because of the heavy material covered it was so great to take a moment to reflect, internalize, and recharge to go on and tackle this huge issue.

Meeting with Dr. Thea James at Boston Medical Center

On our 2nd day in Boston, we had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Thea James at Boston Medical Center. Dr. James spoke to us about her work on addressing social determinants of health through BMC and about her journey to BMC. Dr. James is the associate Chief Medical Officer at BMC and has spearheaded multiple programs aimed at addressing homelessness and the rising cost of healthcare in Boston. She spoke to us about BMC's newest initiative in building housing for homeless patients. This initiative was built partly upon a case study which analyzed how the cost of healthcare dropped when patients received stable housing.

By addressing upstream determinants of health they are able to mitigate downstream costs and symptoms. Part of this program was aimed towards addressing not only housing but also nutrition. BMC partnered with Good Food grocery, which is a community based grocery store that provides local healthy foods to its communities. Throughout her talk she emphasized how these changes were community based and community driven, from the builders to the suppliers. We found Dr. Thea James to be energizing and influential in her work towards addressing social injustices.

Urban Development Tour with Alternatives for Community and Environment

UHS had the opportunity to meet and talk with the Alternatives for Community and Environment in the Boston Roxbury Neighborhood. Students learned about the history of community engagement and urban development in the Roxbury community. It was an eye opening experience for us to see the first hand impacts that public policy and urban development had on the community. Examples include selling of public lands and use of public space as landfills in communities that were previously underserved. The ACE worked to fight for community health by imposing strict laws on idling buses which directly affected the health of their community.



Tour of Y2Y Harvard Square Overnight Shelter

One of the highlights for many in the trip was the tour of Y2Y Harvard Square. Y2Y is the nation's first student-run homeless shelter for young adults. Their mission is to not only provide a safe overnight environment but also to help guide many young adults. The shelter serves as an entry point to provide referrals to other partner service providers. It was inspiring to know that many volunteers dedicate their time to help young adults. For example, student volunteers advised by faculty and professionals offer programming in legal aid, career readiness, job training, and mentoring and offer resources for mental health care and permanent housing. There are also many initiatives for advocacy and support. One of our UHS scholars volunteered to help get the shelter established and it was truly amazing to hear how it all started. One of the most unique aspects of it all is that the shelter is open to all gender identities and sexual orientations. Although we did not get to volunteer this time, we all hope to come back and do so.



Mattapan Health Revival Health Fair

Mattapan Health Revival was a community based health fair in the Mattapan neighborhood. Along with GHS, students volunteered to help run different booths and events such as yoga in the park, and free blood pressure monitoring. We enjoyed the opportunity to engage and witness community engagement through health and wellbeing. The event was the culmination of our trip and a fitting end to our time in Boston.



SAVE THE DATE
SEPTEMBER 7, 2019

MATTAPAN COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER'S
HEALTH CARE REVIVAL **23**



Our Health. Our Power. Our Community

Saturday, September 7, 2019
10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. • 249 River Street, Mattapan



Alumni Dinner with Dr. Achebe

Our Boston trip concluded with an alumni/ae dinner graciously hosted at the home of Dr. Chidi Achebe and Dr. Maureen Achebe. It was incredibly inspiring to hear the diverse stories of several Dartmouth Medical School alumni/ae and former Urban Health Scholars at different stages of their careers who have remained committed to combating social determinants of health in ways that built on their individual passions both inside and outside of medicine.

Dr. Chidi Achebe himself took the time to share his professional journey from Dartmouth and the lessons he learned while having previously worked as the President and CEO of Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center in Dorchester, MA. Dr. Achebe is currently the Chairman and CEO of African Integrated Development Enterprise (AIDE), an organization dedicated to healthcare, education, agriculture, renewable energy, and telecommunications development in the African continent. In this way, from Dr. Achebe's experiences, we also gained valuable perspective on the interconnections and differences between addressing and combating social determinants of health in both global and domestic urban contexts.



NEW YORK TRIP 2020

(Jan. 16-19)

Meeting with Dr. Onakomaya at Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

On our first day in New York City, we visited the Department of Health and Mental hygiene to attend a panel put together by Dr. Onakomaya, an epidemiologist and Dartmouth alumni. The panel consisted of several health care professionals and we got to hear from each throughout the afternoon. We learned about clinical informatics, research conducted in the Bureau of Mental Health, and about the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Residency program. After the panel, we had the opportunity to ask the panelist questions one-on-one. Overall, we learned a lot from this opportunity, especially about mental health research and programs in New York City.

Volunteer/Service with Center for Concerned Medical Practitioners

Dartmouth Urban Health Scholars Learn from the CCMP

By Haider Ghiasuddin and Isabelle Yang

On January 17-18th, 2020, a small group of medical students from the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth came to learn from and volunteer with the Coalition of Concerned Medical Professionals (CCMP) of Suffolk County, Long Island. These students represent the Urban Health Scholars program at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, which brings together medical students considering careers in urban settings and hoping to commit themselves to health equity regardless of where our respective medical careers take us.

Elizabeth Stevens, CCMP's President of the Board of Directors, introduced us to the history of the coalition: how it first grew out of the Eastern Farm Workers Association's (EFWA) volunteer and non-government funded organizing drive of farm workers in Suffolk County who were being paid 62 cents an hour and suffering detrimental health consequences as a result of such exploitative working and living conditions. It was with great admiration for CCMP's services and great sadness for the health care system's indifferent lack of reach that we learned about this history of untreated illness and preventable epidemics inflicted on low-income working people in Suffolk County, Long Island.

Moreover, Stevens explained the model and principles that guide CCMP as it continues to play an important community role at a time when many Americans still suffer preventable health consequences amidst a health care system that they are either invisible to or go into debt for. As Stevens put it, “At CCMP we’re not a navigator, we’re an advocator. Navigators are given a map, and they follow it. Advocators fight obstacles that are embedded in the map.”

Geisel medical students readily embraced CCMP’s energy and love for their community. “I am impressed by the organizing and problem solving at the community level,” said Romina Almada, a first-year medical student at Geisel. “It feels different from the hospitals, where you are constrained by insurance, administrators, bureaucracies ...the agility of CCMP is what makes them effective. Here they hear problems directly from patients, and figure out how they can help them meaningfully.”

Indeed, it became apparent to us that to learn from the CCMP critically calls into question what kind of medical professionals and democratic citizens we choose to become in the future; that there is great bravery and humanistic reward that comes with daring to hold ourselves responsible for our places in present day history, no matter how small or big that might be, and to truly act on convictions aligned with beneficence and justice in medicine.

“We are training to be socially conscious doctors, and we want to help impact social change,” Almada said. “There is something fundamentally wrong and clinically unaware to just prescribe insulin to a patient with diabetes who has to decide between missing rent or rationing medications without knowing the obstacles of their day-to-day struggle.”

During our time in Suffolk County, we were challenged to further bring such convictions to action as we split our group of medical students into teams dedicated to tasks such as recruiting volunteer dentists for the CCMP dental program, researching the possibility of affordable and free emergency dental care in the greater NY area, and sorting through donated medical supplies and contacting patients. Ultimately, we came back together as a group for door-to-door canvassing in Suffolk County to invite community members to join the CCMP family and learn more about its services for those potentially in need.

Dr. Keasha Guerrier, a volunteer family physician with CCMP, also spent time with our group and lent us powerful advice: “It doesn’t matter what you end up doing — brain surgery, sports medicine, etc. — the best thing you can do for your patients is to educate and empower them. We advocate for our patients, but more importantly we teach our patients to advocate for themselves.”

Our brief time at CCMP resonated and inspired so much within us. It is a shining example of how communities facing great obstacles learn to organize and advocate for better health outcomes themselves, and that tradition has been carried on at CCMP throughout its history, from its inception in the 1970s to today.

The CCMP's present and future value to Suffolk County and beyond is perhaps best embodied by its youngest community volunteers such as Chelsea, a junior and biology major at Brooklyn College. Chelsea first learned about CCMP through Vital Signs, and knew instantly that she needed to get involved. By this point she has completed her medical advocacy training, and has been an expert volunteer with CCMP for almost one year.

“At CCMP, we’re always looking to do something, make a difference,” Chelsea said. “This place shows how I want to help people. I knew of people who were uninsured or lacked access to health care, but I never saw how poorly insurance companies can treat patients, and the means patients go through to make ends meet. They need something like CCMP to help advocate.”

Chelsea's dream is to go to medical school one day. Like all of us trying to positively learn in the face of an imperfect system, the hope is to become medical professionals who practice and act in the spirit of health and justice for all.



Meeting with Dr. Farrell Medical Humanities writer and Primary care doctor

In the afternoon, we traveled to Bellevue to meet with Dr. Farrell, a resident on her last year of primary care residency at Bellevue. We learned about Dr. Farrell and her work via Twitter and were inspired by her ability to incorporate the humanities into medicine. During our meeting with her we talked about incorporating our personal interests into medicine, we learned about her experience in residency at Bellevue, and also were able to see parts of the hospital, one of the eldest public hospitals in the United States. This meeting with Dr. Farrell was unique in the sense that we do not often get to meet and hear from doctors who are still relatively early in their medical training.

