

Geisel students build a passion for urban health

Many students arrive at medical school passionate about community service and social justice, but long hours of cramming for exams can make it hard to sustain this sentiment. The Urban Health Scholars (UHS) program at Geisel School of Medicine is designed to help students keep their passion alive and stay connected with the communities that inspired them to pursue medicine.

The idea for UHS came about when two medical students, Sade Ajayi and Shideh Ardestani, were doing a Schweitzer fellowship in cultural competency. They noticed that most graduates pursued residencies in a city but left Dartmouth unprepared for the unique challenges posed by urban medicine. They approached Shawn O’Leary, director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, with the idea of creating a new program modeled on the Rural Health Scholars to meet this need and attract an even more diverse group of students to Geisel.

With help from O’Leary and Dr. Joseph O’Donnell, dean of student affairs, the students secured a \$75,000 grant from Harvard Pilgrim Health Care and, in 2006, recruited the first group of eight scholars. Just six years later the program has 19 scholars, whose prior experiences range from setting up a clinic in Honduras to serving in the relief effort after Hurricane Katrina.

Once selected, the scholars are engaged year-round in service programs, cultural-education symposiums, and journal-review sessions. O’Leary says that the program is unusual in that it is entirely led by students. Scholars frequently volunteer in nearby Manchester, N.H., which is a temporary home to over 1,800 refugees, including Bosnian, Sudanese, Bhutanese, and Somali populations. UHS has also provided mentorship and educational programming to the diverse student body of Manchester Central High School since 2007.

Many scholars have formed strong connections in and around Boston as well. Prior to attending Geisel, scholar Mary Kate Rod volunteered in clinics in Haiti and Nicaragua and worked in Boston as an advocate for the homeless, but it was UHS that introduced her to Lawrence Family Health Center, just outside of Boston. “I did a sub-internship program in Lawrence through UHS,” she says. “People were thinking about medicine in a socially responsible way, and four years later it is my top choice for residency.” These sub-internships, organized entirely through UHS, enable students to gain valuable experience working full-time in an inner-city hospital before graduation. They also get students excited about urban medicine: O’Donnell remembers one scholar who said to him after a day of cultural immersion in

Several scholars used their spring break to volunteer in clinics in Miami.



Urban Health Scholar David Wenger works with a student at Manchester Central High School.

South Boston, “That was the best day in medical school I have ever had!”

Recently, several scholars used their spring break to volunteer in clinics in Miami to learn about the specific needs of immigrant communities and the challenges of bilingual care. UHS also coordinates public talks about the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors that influence urban medical care.

O’Donnell, a longtime proponent of service projects and holistic education programs, can attest that the program benefits medical students in many ways. Most important, he believes, is that UHS helps students follow the advice of Albert Schweitzer: “Grow into your ideals so that life can never rob you of them.”

— Alannah Phelan

Byock publishes book

Dr. Ira Byock, a professor of anesthesiology and the director of DHMC’s palliative care program, has dedicated his career to improving the care people receive at the end of life. In March, he published *The Best Care Possible: A Physician’s Quest to Transform Care Through the End of Life*, which shares

some of the wisdom and insight he has gained over the years. The book addresses difficult but important questions that are being faced every day by individual Americans and by the nation as a whole, and as a result it has garnered a lot of attention. “What makes Dr. Byock’s book particularly

valuable is the chance to eavesdrop on the doctors we’re often quick to blame,” noted a review in the *New York Times*.

For a **WEB EXTRA** with links to interviews with Byock, see dartmed.dartmouth.edu/sp12/we01