

Student Liason to the Student National Medical Association 2025 Annual Report

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Purpose & Scope of Work

The Student Liaison to the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) is a leadership position within the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) created to strengthen and sustain the relationship between the two organizations. This role aims to ensure that underrepresented minority students engaged with the SNMA are introduced to family medicine early in their medical careers and have access to resources and opportunities that promote their success in the field.

The SNMA, founded in 1964 as a subdivision of the National Medical Association (NMA), is the nation's oldest and largest student-run organization focused on the needs and concerns of medical students of color. It became an independent non-profit organization in 1971 with the mission of supporting current and future underrepresented minority medical students, addressing the healthcare needs of underserved communities, and increasing the number of clinically excellent, culturally competent, and socially conscious physicians. SNMA chapters, established at allopathic and osteopathic medical schools nationwide, implement programs that enhance cultural sensitivity in medical education and work to increase enrollment and graduation rates among African American, Latino, and other students of color.

The Student Liaison to the SNMA collaborates with leadership from both the SNMA and AAFP to provide students with greater exposure to the field of family medicine. The liaison's responsibilities include disseminating information about AAFP initiatives such as the National Conference and scholarship opportunities, promoting engagement in both organizations, and cultivating a supportive and inclusive environment for underrepresented students. Through this role, the AAFP and SNMA work together to empower future physicians who are committed to serving their communities with cultural competence and compassion.

Year in Review

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Specialty Interest Hour: Family Medicine Panel at AMEC

In the spring, one of my first major responsibilities as Student Liaison was coordinating the AAFP's involvement at the Annual Medical Education Conference (AMEC), the SNMA's national convention. I organized and led an informational panel during the "Specialty Interest Hour," a dedicated session where each medical specialty hosts an educational event for attendees. For family medicine, I curated and moderated a one-hour panel discussion designed to introduce students to the field through the lens of lived experiences.

I recruited four panelists, three family medicine residents and one attending physician who also serves as an assistant program director at Henry Ford Health in Detroit, MI. I connected with these panelists through the Academy of Black Family Physicians and held preparatory meetings to outline key discussion points. The panelists shared their journeys into family medicine, highlighting both successes and challenges, particularly those related to being physicians of color.

A central theme of the discussion was the unique experience of underrepresented in medicine (URiM) students and physicians, such as being one of the few people of color in a residency program or navigating the emotional weight of being a cultural touchstone for patients who see themselves reflected in you. We explored how this dynamic can be both an honor and a source of burnout. The panelists also emphasized the importance of self-care, building a strong support system, and selecting a residency program that values inclusion and wellness.

The session drew over 50 attendees, including medical students, pre-medical students, and family medicine physicians. It fostered meaningful connections, and students were able to exchange contact information with panelists to continue the conversation beyond the session.

FMIG Monthly Newsletter

Another key responsibility in this role is facilitating the exchange of resources between the AAFP and the SNMA. Each month, I contribute updates from the SNMA to the Family Medicine Interest Group (FMIG) national newsletter, which is distributed to FMIG chapters across the country. For example, before AMEC, I included information about the conference, our family medicine panel, and available scholarship opportunities in my section of the newsletter. In addition to sharing SNMA updates with FMIG chapters, I also distribute AAFP-related resources, including information on upcoming events and programs, back to the SNMA community. I do this through SNMA's Monthly Opportunities Newsletter, the Family Medicine Specialty Interest Group (SIG) GroupMe, and other communication channels. Looking ahead, it would be ideal to create a dedicated listserv of SNMA chapter contacts to ensure broader and more consistent dissemination of FMIG and AAFP resources.

FUTURE BIPOC Workshop

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In collaboration with the AAFP Center for Diversity, Health Equity, and Global Health, I will plan and facilitate a workshop for BIPOC students attending FUTURE. The session will focus on navigating family medicine residency and clinical practice as a BIPOC physician, understanding the current medical landscape, and building meaningful connections with patients of color while maintaining healthy professional boundaries.

Social Media: Minority Health Month

In February, in recognition of Minority Health Month, I collaborated with the AAFP's social media team to create an educational video highlighting five ways to promote health equity in everyday clinical practice. The video emphasized the importance of addressing social drivers of health (SDOH), such as neighborhood safety, accessibility, and access to fresh, nutritious food. I also spoke about the powerful role of mentorship in supporting underrepresented students in medicine and the broader impact of understanding patients' lived environments on delivering equitable care.

Reflection

This past year has been particularly challenging for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts in the United States, making roles like this more vital than ever. Research has consistently shown that patients often experience better health outcomes when cared for by physicians who share their racial or ethnic background (Alsan et al., 2019). Despite this, a stark gap remains: while over 40% of the U.S. population identifies as nonwhite, only about 11% of physicians identify as Black, Hispanic, or Native American (AAMC, 2023).

These disparities have real consequences. For example, Black women in the U.S. are nearly three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women, regardless of income or education level (CDC, 2023). Similarly, communities of color consistently face worse outcomes across a range of health indicators, from chronic disease management to access to preventative care.

There is an urgent need for more physicians who not only reflect the communities they serve but also understand the cultural and structural factors impacting their patients' lives. However, the very barriers that harm the health of our patients including financial insecurity, systemic inequities, limited educational opportunities, also affect our pipeline of future physicians. Many underrepresented in medicine (URiM) students are the first in their families to pursue medical education. They may lack mentorship, exposure to certain specialties, or an understanding of the tangible impact they could have by becoming a primary care physician in their communities. This position plays a critical role in addressing those barriers by supporting and educating URiM medical students. It helps fill the knowledge gap around what a career in family medicine entails and offers access to resources and role models who make that path feel both real and attainable.

Personally, this role has been transformative. As a URiM student, the opportunities and connections I've gained have been invaluable. Traveling to AAFP headquarters in Kansas City, meeting AAFP staff, and being introduced to mentors and future leadership opportunities have

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been instrumental as I prepare to apply for residency. One of the highlights was connecting virtually with Dr. Kameron Matthews of CityBlock Health, who attended and contributed to discussion at my AMEC event, a full-circle moment that underscored the power of relationships and representation.

This position exemplifies the importance of giving students not just a voice, but a seat at the table where decisions are being made. I highly recommend this opportunity to highly-motivated medical students interested in family medicine who value mentorship, networking, and contributing to a more equitable healthcare system.

References:

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