

## **Nikhil Vatti, MD**

### **RESIDENCY**

Southern Illinois University (SIU) Family Medicine Residency Program, Decatur, IL

### **MEDICAL SCHOOL**

NRI Medical College and Medical Sciences, Guntur, AP, India

Dr. Vatti counts receiving the AAFP Award of Excellence in Graduate Medical Education, publishing his systemic review article on the long-term effects of COVID-19 with *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, and being able to help individuals halfway across the world through Project Madad to educate rural health workers in India about COVID-19 as his top professional accomplishments. Professionally, his interests include working with organizations such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and Project Madad and working at free health clinics to provide care for Americans unable to access and afford primary health care. Following residency, Vatti plans to pursue a fellowship in sports medicine and become an academic faculty member. He also plans to continue advocating for patients in his care and legislatively and work with the AAFP to educate the public about preventive health care. In his free time, he enjoys serving disenfranchised populations and studying athletic injuries and chronic conditions, post-COVID-19 complications, and mental illness. He also hopes to one day attend the World Cup and Olympics.

### **Awards and Recognition**

2022	Long-term effects of COVID-19, <i>Mayo Clinic Proceedings</i>
2021-2022	<i>The Economic Times/Hindu Times</i> articles citing my volunteer group Project Madad's efforts in India
2021-Present	SIU medical students mentoring and teaching
2020-Present	Educating SIU Decatur pediatric population on nutrition/exercise habits at free school physical events
2019	Chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyradiculoneuropathy (CIDP) as an autoimmune disease article cited more than 30 times
2019	American Externship Family Medicine Chief Extern Award
2017	AP Medical College Ethics Awareness Honors Certificate
2017	Top 25% of the Class in Medicine Honor
2009-2010	Presidential Award for Academic Excellence, Honor Roll

### **Offices and Appointments**

2022-Present	Chief resident, SIU Decatur Family Medicine Program
2021-Present	Reno-culinary medical committee advisor, University of Nevada
2019	Volunteer advisor, ProYouth and Families
2018-2019	Medical student lead, California CareForce
2015-2018	Captain, Medical College Soccer team

### **Community and Public Services**

2022-Present	Volunteer, Salvation Army
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2021-Present	Project Madad, education of registered medical practitioners in India and fundraising for COVID-19 vaccines in India
2020-Present	Volunteer, Reach Out and Read, a program encouraging reading in pediatric patients
2019-Present	Advocate, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) California State Congress for bills AB680, AB2830, SB1338, and SB539
2019-2020	Member, Patient Advisory Council, Kaiser Permanente
2019	NAMI Walks fundraiser for mental health awareness
2018-Present	Free health care medical volunteer, California CareForce

### **Personal Statement from Dr. Nikhil Vatti**

As a freshman in high school, I was drawn to the subjects of biology and chemistry. I was fascinated by the human body and the everyday molecular reactions. I also enjoyed volunteering to help underserved communities in the greater Sacramento area (e.g., working in soup kitchens, mentoring middle school kids). Working in these poverty-stricken areas made me realize that many people, regardless of their walk of life, require health care and education to lead more sustainable lives. To gain further experience providing this education, I volunteered at a local University of California (UC) Davis-affiliated free health care clinic called Bayanihan Clinic. At this clinic, I worked with multiple primary care physicians who treated patients ranging from children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to adults with congestive heart failure and poorly controlled diabetes. Witnessing physicians interacting with patients and seeing the differences they make in the patients they treat showed me that even the small things can make a significant difference in a patient's life. The physician I shadowed said that physicians like him are the first line of defense in many cases for patients, and preventive health care is of utmost importance for the underserved population of America. If we give tools to patients for them to lead healthy, sustainable lifestyles, we can avoid treating patients at later stages of diseases. I knew I had found my calling. It was a combination of my natural draw to the sciences of the human body and serving the public. These fundamental experiences led me to start medical school right after high school.

Though my interest in family medicine started long before I entered medical school, it became more solidified during primary care rotations in medical school. I encountered patients suffering from medical conditions such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and bipolar disorders. I realized that I could best serve my local community by becoming a family medicine physician because of the variety and number of cases the providers of this specialty encounter during their careers. Not only do I want to treat common medical diseases in the local community, but I also want to spread awareness of mental illnesses. During my family medicine rotations, I have encountered many patients who have undiagnosed mental conditions impacting their overall health. This piqued my interest in this specialty because I realized that family medicine physicians significantly affect patients' lives by addressing their physical and mental health issues. Psychiatrists are overwhelmed with the number of patients needing psychiatric care, leading to my belief that primary care physicians must step up screening, diagnosing, and treating mental disorders in their preliminary stages. I'm also drawn to family medicine because

of the personal interactions with patients and the impact physicians in this field can have on a larger scale throughout their life (from childhood to adulthood). Family physicians can also help marginalized and uninsured populations by increasing access to quality, affordable health care. I joined California CareForce because I am passionate about providing health care to marginalized people. This non-profit organization provides local communities with free health care services throughout California. Participating in events like this also helps educate a portion of the population that would not otherwise have the means or knowledge to get the health care they need. Raising awareness is the first step to changing the current health care system. I plan on volunteering at events and raising public awareness about health care throughout my residency and career.

### **Overcoming Obstacles**

In the middle of medical school, I became severely ill due to a multidrug-resistant bacterial infection that caused pneumonia, empyema, and a complete collapse of my left lung. I required emergent thoracic decortication of my left lung pleura because of significant pleural thickening that resulted from the infection. During this near-fatal illness, I dropped from 185 pounds to 120 pounds due to the effects of the infection and medications, my appetite, and my oral intake. My postsurgical recovery regimen was arduous and lasted almost a year. I slowly retrained my body through physical therapy on how to walk again and regained my upper body strength.

I debated whether it would be safe to return to medical school given my recent recovery from this illness. To make this decision, I reflected on why I initially wanted to pursue medicine. Recalling all my experiences and journey to treatment reignited my passion for continuing with my recovery. I joined medicine to help others. Even though I went through something traumatic, both physically and mentally, I should continue to strive to help those in the community unable to afford health care or in underserved areas. Each day of physical therapy, I pushed myself harder to achieve my goal of being the best possible doctor for my future patients. My hard work paid off, and I returned to medical school and rejoined sports like soccer, where I became a captain of the medical college team two years in a row. I gained a more in-depth perspective on life-changing illnesses because of my illness. Because of this experience, I believe I am better equipped to relate, empathize, and understand the severe toll illness takes on patients.

### **My Unique Journey**

My work ethic, leadership abilities, and community service record separate me from other AAFP Award for Excellence in Graduate Medical Education candidates. Every day in my clinic, I strive to provide my patients with the best possible care they can get in my clinic. This can be challenging in areas like Decatur, IL, where referrals to the appropriate specialists are extremely limited. However, this has allowed me to take care of complex patients that require extensive knowledge that often goes beyond the scope of a general family medicine physician. My leadership ability has been praised throughout my life, from my co-residents to my soccer teammates in high school, college, and residency. I have been described as a visionary and democratic leader. I assist my interns in discovering their strengths and weaknesses and ask them how I can enhance their knowledge about specific fields in medicine and help them become

better doctors. All the interns and medical students I have worked with say they appreciate my democratic approach to creating treatment plans and conducting research projects. They state that this approach allows them to feel more engaged in a safe environment and spitball ideas right or wrong without feeling judged.

My community service record is my biggest accomplishment as a resident, especially my most recent community service project. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in India in the late summer of 2021, the Indian health care system was under even more stress than it usually is. There were only 3.2 government hospital beds per 10,000 citizens, which was well below the World Health Organization (WHO)-recommended levels. Many patients had no access to hospital beds and much fewer guideline-approved COVID-19 treatments. To address this health care need, I helped found an organization called Project Madad, consisting of U.S. doctors, pharmacists, Indian citizens, and a United Nations ambassador. Our objective was to help Indian rural communities by educating over 1,500 remote health care workers (RHW), who often were without education on the COVID-19 virus, and combat COVID-19 misinformation among the public.

To assist the RHWs, we created a digital health platform to improve disease surveillance in remote populations. We also raise funds for a door-to-door universal vaccination program for an entire town with difficulties accessing vaccines. To combat false information among average citizens, we used social media to provide official guidelines for the public. Lastly, we developed a one-of-a-kind application (app) called MadadMaps that offers the public real-time availability of hospital beds and hospitals with ventilators and oxygen tanks in their area. To this date, more than 103,000 people have used this app.

I believe I am worthy of the AAFP Award for Excellence in Graduate Medical Education because of my devotion to constantly improving the way I practice medicine, dedication to providing the best possible health care to my patients, passion for clinical research, leadership qualities, eagerness to help those in need, and commitment to continuing community outreach programs and community service. This award will reflect my journey to become a family medicine physician and the attending, mentor, and person I wish to be.

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