

# UConn HEALTH

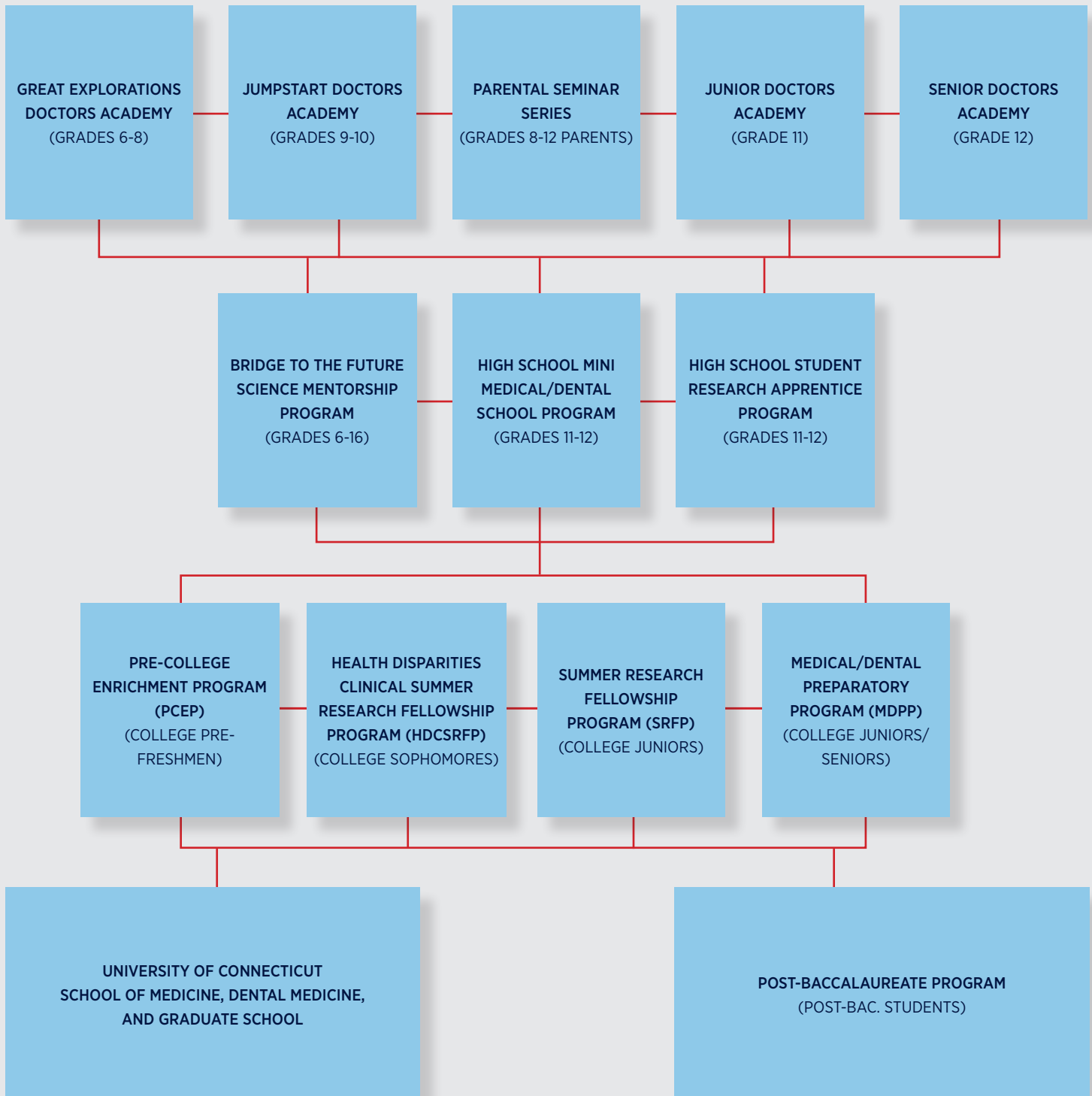
HEALTH CAREER  
OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS



Read about the Aetna Health Professions  
Partnership Initiative and Pipeline  
Programs at: [health.uconn.edu/hcop](https://health.uconn.edu/hcop)

DECEMBER 2022

# AETNA HPPI PIPELINE



## WELCOME FROM DR. MARJA HURLEY



The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs remains integral to the Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine at UConn Health. The Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine are actively committed to the recruitment, retention, and graduation of diverse medical and dental students capable of providing culturally competent health care. On July 29, we proudly celebrated

26 years of the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative (Aetna HPPI) during the 2022 Summer Closing Ceremony. Dr. Kenneth Alleyne, Chair of the Connecticut Health Foundation, member of the UConn Health Board of Directors, and community physician at Eastern Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine in Connecticut and New York Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine in New York, served as our keynote speaker. Dr. Ayibatari Sikpi, Clinical Fellow with the Child Study Center at Yale School of Medicine, a graduate of the UConn School of Medicine Class of 2018, and former Aetna HPPI pipeline participant, served as our medical alumna speaker.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic impacted many aspects of our programs for middle school, high school, and college students, the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs has successfully delivered many components of the Aetna HPPI programs virtually. However, I look forward to reinstating most programs as in-person while continuing others as Virtual or Hybrid.

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs continues to support currently enrolled medical, dental, and graduate students of diverse backgrounds. We expanded these efforts by implementing a Medical and Dental Alumni seminar series, now in its second year. Virtual mentoring by currently enrolled medical and dental students of middle school and high school students has been expanded. To increase STEM awareness for students in our Doctors Academy, we continued our collaborations with the Connecticut Science Center and developed new collaborations with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Hartford.

This year, I congratulate our graduating seniors participating in the high school Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy, who were all accepted into colleges. Special congratulations to the Health Career Opportunity Programs scholars in the School of Medicine (SOM) and School of Dental Medicine (SODM) graduating class of 2022. In the

SOM, 24% of the graduating class are Health Career Opportunity Programs scholars, while 31% of the graduating class in the SODM are Health Career Opportunity Programs scholars. We are also proud that 59% of the underrepresented students currently enrolled in the SOM are Aetna HPPI pipeline students, and 34% of the underrepresented students currently enrolled in the SODM are Aetna HPPI pipeline students.

The Aetna HPPI programs sponsored by the Department of Health Career Opportunity programs are recognized as a national model. In 1996, UConn Health, along with the Hartford School District, Central Connecticut State University, the University of Connecticut, and Wesleyan University, developed the Aetna HPPI in response to the Association of American Medical Colleges' Project 3000 By 2000 initiative to increase the number of students from first-generation and underrepresented groups in the health professions. The Aetna HPPI programs have sent more than 1200 participants to medical school, dental school, graduate school, or other health professional schools. Further success of the programs is noted by the number of physicians and dentists from diverse backgrounds who currently practice primary care, medicine, and dental medicine in Connecticut or have embarked on careers in academic medicine or dental medicine.

Despite COVID-19, 102 middle school, high school, and college students participated virtually in our 2022 summer programs through the Aetna HPPI. During the 2022-2023 academic year, we anticipate approximately 300 students participating in our Aetna HPPI middle school, high school, and college programs. It is gratifying that the community recognizes the importance of these programs in promoting diversity in the health professions and has continued to support these efforts over the last 26 years.

I thank our faculty, staff, and students at UConn Health and partner institutions for their dedication and support. Also, special thanks to our funders, including the John and Valerie Rowe Health Professions Scholars Program Endowment Fund, which supports some of our existing programmatic initiatives.

### **MARJA HURLEY, MD**

UConn Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor  
Professor of Medicine and Orthopaedic Surgery  
Associate Dean of Health Career Opportunity Programs  
Founding Director of Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative  
UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine

## **A NOTE FROM DR. GRANVILLE WRENSFORD**



It has been another year in which our department conducted its activities in a virtual environment. Although not ideal, we used the experience from the previous years to improve our interactions with the students, parents, and other constituents. Again, I must commend the teachers, counselors, mentors, and staff who made the necessary adjustments

to ensure a successful year. Among the activities were a Doctors Academy reunion and another amazing virtual closing ceremony where we celebrated the achievements of all the participants, especially the graduating seniors of the Doctors Academy. Despite the challenges, we were still able to engage in several activities besides academic instruction in a virtual format. We continued our collaboration with the Connecticut Science Center, where our participants interacted with staff and students to explore scientific principles. We also had special mentoring and other sessions by the Rowe Scholars, practicing health professionals, graduate students, and faculty who provided wide-ranging exposure to our students.



This year is also filled with personal emotions as I have decided to retire. I have been with the department for the past thirteen years, and it has truly been a blessing to interact with all the students/ participants in the many programs and activities the department sponsors. During my time here, I have seen many milestones and student accomplishments. Seeing the students realize their goals and dreams of becoming health professionals has certainly been a pleasure.

It is heartwarming to see so many students excited about the health sciences and careers in the health professions. I am eternally grateful to the many individuals who contributed to the success of the programs, which can be seen at various stages of the pipeline. At the middle and high school levels, we have seen a high persistence rate from one grade to the next. The graduating high school seniors have consistently performed at a higher level on the SAT compared to other students in the Hartford school district. Each year all the graduating seniors have been accepted and matriculated in college, with several obtaining valuable scholarships from various colleges/universities. Several students from the Doctors Academy have matriculated and graduated from the UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine. These are some of the accomplishments that have made my tenure here so rewarding.

As we prepare for another year, I must acknowledge the program's parents, guardians, and students for their firm commitment. A special thank you to the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs staff, faculty, students, and other professionals here at UConn Health and the larger community who have volunteered their time to mentor and interact with the participants in our programs.

A fond farewell and much success in the years to come!

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### **Granville Wrensford, Ph.D.**

Assistant Dean and Associate Director  
Health Career Opportunity Programs  
UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine

## GREETINGS FROM DR. KERRY-ANN STEWART



We are extremely proud of the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative (HPPI) pipeline participants as they transition to the next stage of their educational and professional journeys. I am always excited to congratulate the graduates of the Senior Doctors Academy as they begin their lives as undergraduate students, as well as the graduates of the UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine as they proceed to residency programs or dental practice.

This past academic year and summer, we continued to provide a community for students to learn engaging and innovative concepts to gain more exposure to the health professions. Through these enrichment events, we introduced the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy participants to the daily activities of practicing physicians and dentists in specialties ranging from radiology to surgery to general dentistry. Furthermore, the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program offered undergraduate and recent college graduates



the opportunity to better prepare for medical or dental school admissions and academic life as a first-year medical or dental student. This summer, rising high school seniors engaged in virtual biomedical science projects, and rising first-year college students engaged in college-level science coursework at UConn Storrs.

Our participation in virtual events with community partners, such as the Boys & Girls Clubs of Hartford, allowed participants to be exposed to healthy lifestyles through presentations on nutrition, exercise, and oral care. Furthermore, the Bridge to the Future Science Mentoring Conference continues to prepare college students for careers in medicine, dental medicine, and research. Through virtual presentations and exhibitor fairs for pre-medical and pre-dental students, we continued to expand our collaborations with UConn Storrs and colleges and universities here in Connecticut and across the country. It was a pleasure to meet with UConn Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) undergraduate students who are interested in biomedical research and have them interact with UConn Health research faculty and graduate students through virtual panels.

Seeing our middle school, high school, and college Aetna HPPI participants accomplish their goals is truly rewarding. We also extend our appreciation to the UConn chapters of the Student National Medical Association, the Latino Medical Student Association, and the Student National Dental Association/Hispanic Student Dental Association, who mentored students at various academic levels through Aetna HPPI pipeline programs and community outreach. I thank the UConn community for its continuous support of the Aetna HPPI programs. Our faculty, instructors, mentors, tutors, seminar speakers, and counselors continue to help make these programs a great success each year.

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### **Kerry-Ann Stewart, Ph.D.**

Assistant Director of Health Career Opportunity Programs  
Assistant Professor of Public Health Sciences  
UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine

**ADEOLA ADEYEYE, MD**

Physician, Medical Student, Mentor



Dr. Adeola Adeyeye graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2022.

Dr. Adeyeye attended Stony Brook University in Stony Brook, New York, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a concentration in Developmental Genetics. Along with her undergraduate major, she also graduated with a minor in Women and Gender Studies & Health and Wellness.

While in middle school, Dr. Adeyeye was fascinated by childbirth due to her mother's career as a midwife and psychiatry nurse. Her mother's consultations and involvement in the lives of family and friends have always inspired Dr. Adeyeye to care for women. "My passion for women's health continued to grow in high school and college, which led me to study Women and Gender & Health and Wellness and participate in clinical research in obstetrics and gynecology. It was just natural for me to continue to pursue a specialty in medicine caring for women," shares Dr. Adeyeye.

Currently, Dr. Adeyeye is attending a residency in obstetrics and gynecology at Stony Brook School of Medicine in New York. She also plans to become involved in academic medicine through a clerkship in a faculty and program director position. "I love teaching and mentoring and would love to continue my passion in medical and residency education," states Dr. Adeyeye.

Dr. Adeyeye became involved with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs during her first year at UConn School of Medicine as a mentor for the Doctors Academy. "As a first-year medical student, I was very excited to be involved in a mentorship role because I found my relationships with others in roles that I aspired to be in very rewarding. I also enjoy making lesson plans and coaching adolescents. I found this program to be a perfect fit for me and was motivated to give back to communities in need of role models and representation," explains Dr. Adeyeye.

Dr. Adeyeye's best Health Career Opportunity Programs experience was serving as a mentor for four years with the Doctors Academy program. One of her favorite lessons focused on first aid. She set up various stations with different scenarios to prompt the high school students to act like first responders to various injuries (sprained ankle, falls, lacerations, and burns). She also discussed cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and the importance of basic life support. "The students had an awesome time putting themselves in the shoes of a first responder and gained so much knowledge and curiosity from this experience. Interactions like this and many more continue to motivate my cause," states Dr. Adeyeye.

**"My biggest words of encouragement and advice to the younger generation would be to practice patience and self-love while being persistent, especially during difficult times or when success appears to be delayed."**

Dr. Adeyeye leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: "Winston Churchill once said, 'Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.' I think this quote highlights the importance of perseverance. My biggest words of encouragement and advice to the younger generation would be to practice patience and self-love while being persistent, especially during difficult times or when success appears to be delayed. I truly believe that being determined and dedicated will be very rewarding in the end."

**AARON HOLMES, MD**

Physician, Medical Student, Mentor



Dr. Aaron Holmes graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2022.

Dr. Holmes attended Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biochemistry in 2018. As a result of completing an oral examination, he also received an honors designation with his degree.

Prior to attending college and medical school, Dr. Holmes became interested in science at the age of 16 after wanting to understand more about cancer disease state. “I became very interested in the intricacies of a cell, physiologic processes, and the pathogenesis of cancers after reading up about the topic. I also saw firsthand how the disease affected my family and how physicians supported us during this difficult period,” states Dr. Holmes. His personal experience sparked an interest in wanting to help to diminish cancer. At age 18, he strongly considered becoming a physician. He saw this career path as a way to engage in science and make a close human connection with patients. Throughout his undergraduate career, Dr. Holmes attained shadowing experiences in the medical sciences, particularly in pathobiology. Additionally, his participation as a volunteer in community services helped him realize his love for working with people, which helped to solidify his decision to attend medical school.

Currently, Dr. Holmes is attending a 3-year internal medicine residency at Weill Cornell Medicine, New York Presbyterian, New York, New York.

Dr. Holmes became involved with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs during his first year at UConn School of Medicine. During this time, he was the Co-Mentorship Coordinator for the UConn Chapter of the Student National Medical Association (SNMA). “In this role, my classmate Gabe and I occasionally organized volunteers for the Saturday Academy program and the

Bridge Conference. I collaborated closely with Ms. Higgins and Dr. Stewart during this time. I became really interested in the Saturday Academy program afterward and participated in it for the next three years,” shares Dr. Holmes.

Dr. Holmes’ best experience through the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs and the UConn SNMA is working with *Cut Hypertension*, a club where medical students take blood pressure readings at a local barbershop with predominantly Black/African American clientele. “Similar chapters are present at other medical schools, and these interventions have been shown to improve blood pressure control. I started volunteering in my second year and had the privilege to restart the club with my classmate, Ghalib, during my fourth year, when COVID cases began coming down,” said Dr. Holmes. This experience showed him how to begin community interventions and connect people to their health outside of a health care setting.

**“Be interested in the world with an open mind. Try to seek opportunities that make you grow as a person, whether in classes or volunteer spaces.”**

Dr. Holmes leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: “Be interested in the world with an open mind. Try to seek opportunities that make you grow as a person, whether in classes or volunteer spaces. Gravitates towards mentors, counselors, and teachers who support your goals.”

**ZENON KANE, MD**

Physician, Medical Student, Mentor



Dr. Zenon Kane graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2022.

Dr. Kane attended Arizona State University in Tempe, AZ, where he graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Kinesiology in May 2014.

Dr. Kane knew that he wanted to become a physician at the age of 10. This is due to

witnessing the health condition and surgical treatment of a loved one born with a birth defect of the skull. “I remember looking up to the physicians that cared for her and wanting to do the same,” reflects Dr. Kane.

Dr. Kane has returned to his hometown of Tucson, Arizona, to complete a Preliminary Internal Medicine residency at the University of Arizona. He is also interested in completing an interventional pain fellowship after residency training.

**“Medicine is a challenging yet fulfilling career path. If you are willing to put in the effort to get to medical or dental school, it is so worth it.”**

During Dr. Kane’s interview at UConn School of Medicine, he met current students who volunteered with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs. After being introduced to the department, he felt like the program would offer a great support system for him, especially if he was going to be far away from home. After matriculating at UConn School of Medicine, he enrolled in the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II-Basic Medical Sciences (BMS) Program, which he states is his favorite Health Career Opportunity Programs experience. “This program helped prepare

me for what the first semester of medical school would be like and introduced me to some of my future classmates, many of whom are my closest friends to this day. After that summer experience, I wanted to continue working with Health Career Opportunity Programs and did so by becoming involved with the Student National Medical Association (SNMA),” shares Dr. Kane. He expresses his gratitude for all the support Health Career Opportunity Programs has provided through his journey in medical school.

Dr. Kane leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: “Medicine is a challenging yet fulfilling career path. If you are willing to put in the effort to get to medical or dental school, it is so worth it. I would recommend shadowing a physician or dentist for a few days to see what medicine looks like on a day-to-day basis so you have an idea of what it is really like. Most importantly, if medicine is your dream, do not give up on it. Getting into medical or dental school can be challenging, and it is okay if it takes multiple tries!... No matter the hardships, never give up.”



## **JOSHUA KWOLEK, DMD**

Dentist, Dental Student, Mentor



Dr. Joshua Kwolek graduated from the UConn School of Dental Medicine in May 2022.

Dr. Kwolek attended Berklee School of Music in Boston, Massachusetts, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Music Business/Management in 2012. Dr. Kwolek later completed a Pre-Medical Post-Baccalaureate Certificate at Harvard Extension School in 2017.

At about the age of 25, Dr. Kwolek realized that he would like to pursue a career in dentistry. While working in the concert production industry in Nashville, he learned through his church of a non-profit that organized affordable full-mouth rehabilitation for those suffering from major tooth and jawbone loss after situations of addiction. "I was enamored with all their stories. In many cases, these individuals could not find work or make social connections for years. Learning about these groups fighting to help people reclaim their lives compelled me to re-evaluate my career goals completely," states Dr. Kwolek.

Dr. Kwolek is currently attending a 2-year residency at the University of Alabama. The program focuses on expanding access to implant-supported prostheses in communities of need and is affiliated with various shelters and a drug rehabilitation program. "I hope to bring the methods and skills from the program to offer similar services in my private practice," shares Dr. Kwolek.

From his initial interview at UConn School of Dental Medicine, Dr. Kwolek wanted to become involved with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs. "I believe that health institutions should do their best to connect with people from every corner of the map to encourage a steady supply of caregivers available to every community," he explains.

Dr. Kwolek's favorite Health Career Opportunity Programs experience was participating as a panelist for department events and programs such as the Bridge to the Future Science Mentoring Conference, where he spent some time with high school and college students interested in health careers. "I hope that we were able to provide some worthwhile advice and encouragement. The program tries to round up medical and dental students with a variety of different life experiences: I wanted to make sure that returning students considering second careers saw that it's never too late!" states Dr. Kwolek.

**"I believe that health institutions should do their best to connect with people from every corner of the map to encourage a steady supply of caregivers available to every community."**

Dr. Kwolek leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: "There will be times when your obligations feel completely overwhelming, and depending on where your career leads, this may be the case for years or decades to come. That's why it is crucial to set aside some time each week to keep in touch with yourself and the people and activities you love. Chronic burnout is not just a struggle for you and those close to you, but it also prevents you from performing to the best of your abilities. An extra few hours of sleep, exercise, or leisure can go much further than filling your entire week with back-to-back studying. And remember that acting in kindness is the ultimate career success strategy."

**KLAIR LUBONJA, MD**

Physician, Medical Student, Mentor



Dr. Klair Lubonja graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2022.

Dr. Lubonja attended the University of Connecticut in Storrs, Connecticut, for his undergraduate education, where he was a Rowe Scholar and an Honor Scholar. In 2015, he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Molecular and Cell Biology with a minor in Political Science. Subsequently, he

participated in the University of Connecticut Post-Baccalaureate Program from 2016 to 2017.

Dr. Lubonja decided that he wanted to become a physician during his early high school years. After being exposed to the health care field, he took into account his personality, strengths, and love for science and wanted to use these to give back to the community. After exploring other fields in the health professions and with careful thought, he decided to become a physician/surgeon. "I was fortunate to participate in a science enrichment program offered by the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs at UConn Health. That initial program sparked my interest in medicine, and the rest is history. Overall, the decision was well thought out," said Dr. Lubonja.

Currently, Dr. Lubonja is attending a general surgery residency at Dartmouth- Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon, New Hampshire. After residency, his future goals include participating in clinical or translational research and working in an academic setting, as he finds passing on knowledge through teaching and mentorship rewarding.

Dr. Lubonja was introduced to the Health Career Opportunity Programs during high school through a partnership between the department and his school, Sport and Medical Sciences Academy. Since this experience, Dr. Lubonja later participated in several programs offered by the Department of Health Career Opportunity

Programs at UConn Health. He participated in the 2010 High School Student Research Apprentice Program, the 2011 Pre-College Research Program, the 2012 College Enrichment Program, the 2014 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track I-MCAT Preparation, and the 2018 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II-Basic Medical Sciences Program. Throughout his time at UConn School of Medicine, he tried to give back to Health Career Opportunity Programs, as he was grateful for all the department had given him. His best experience was being the Resident Assistant/ Tutor for the 2019 Pre-College Enrichment Program. "I was a participant of the program before I matriculated to UConn [for] undergraduate [studies] and gained much by my participation, including a published paper. Being able to give back to the program by being the Resident Assistant/ Tutor was enormously rewarding," shares Dr. Lubonja.

**"Being able to give back to the program by being the Resident Assistant/Tutor was enormously rewarding."**

Dr. Lubonja leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: "Once you are sure that you want to pursue a career in the health professions, work hard at taking advantage of all of the opportunities within your field of choice so that you set yourself apart from others also interested in the same field. Participate in research by conducting experiments or by presenting at conferences. Hold leadership positions in professional societies or student organizations pertaining to your field of choice. Volunteer for events related to your field of choice. By setting yourself apart and showing initiative, you will ultimately be very successful. Luckily, participating in Health Career Opportunity Programs allows you to participate in all of the aforementioned suggestions!"

**PAUL NWOKEJI, DMD**

Dentist, Dental Student, Mentor



Dr. Paul Nwokeji graduated from the UConn School of Dental Medicine in May 2022.

Dr. Nwokeji attended the University of Connecticut in Storrs, Connecticut, for his undergraduate education, where he was also a scholar-athlete in football. In 2016, he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Anthropology. Dr. Nwokeji later completed a Master's

degree in Biomedical Science through the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at Rutgers University- Newark Campus.

While in high school, Dr. Nwokeji knew he wanted a career in patient care. He knew his skills would be excellent for a job in health care. "Before I went to college, I knew I wanted to be in health care after my football career, so I wanted to make sure I used my athletic scholarship to get a degree to do that. Along the way, I shadowed many health care providers, and they all showed me that I was definitely heading in the right direction. I saw qualities of compassion, brilliance, leadership, and much more. All these providers showed me how patient care can be done and what is necessary. What drew me to want to go to dental school was that my dental mentors had autonomy, great rapport with their patients, fine-tuned hand skills, and a lot of knowledge," states Dr. Nwokeji. He was attracted to dentistry focused on orthodontics and oral surgery.

Dr. Nwokeji is currently attending a 6-year Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery residency at the University of Connecticut. Afterward, he would like to own a private practice and work as an oral surgeon. He would also like to consider working in a hospital/academic setting, teaching dental students and residents.

As a graduate student, Dr. Nwokeji became involved with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs at the Bridge to the Future Science Mentoring Conference. "My friend told me Health Career Opportunity Programs [HCOP] was a great resource and support system for students who need guidance getting into the health care field, especially those from underrepresented

populations. When I learned more about HCOP, like a part of its vision is to promote diversity in health care, I knew I wanted to get involved," shares Dr. Nwokeji.

One of Dr. Nwokeji's best Health Career Opportunity Programs experience was moderating the first Student-Athlete panel for college students during the 2021 Bridge to the Future Science Mentoring Conference. He loved the ability to coordinate and carry out this event to help mentor and guide student-athletes into the health field. He saw this panel as adding to the resources that the Department has for students, giving them more guidance, especially to student-athletes who may be overwhelmed navigating sports and preparing for a doctoral program.

**"When I learned more about HCOP, like a part of its vision is to promote diversity in health care, I knew I wanted to get involved."**

Dr. Nwokeji has also enjoyed serving as a mentor for the Aetna HPPI Doctors Program during the four years of his dental education. He was grateful and humbled to see the students grow academically, prepare for college, and build their confidence. Additionally, Dr. Nwokeji has enjoyed representing the School of Dental Medicine and Health Career Opportunity Programs by meeting with dental school applicants during their interview day.

Dr. Nwokeji leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: "Always seek out mentorship in all phases of your life, from multiple people too. The amount of wisdom from someone who is doing what you want to do is invaluable. Always having someone to answer all your questions has a big impact on your life, and it is only positive. And don't forget to pay it forward. Be the change you want to see. If you want more diverse and cohesive health care, mentoring and being in places of influence are the way. Health Career Opportunity Programs is a great place to be involved if you want to be in health care, and it doesn't have to stop at getting into a doctorate program. You can do even more things from here."

## TIJESUNIMI ONI, MD

Physician, Medical Student, Mentor



Dr. Tijesunimi Oni graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2022.

Dr. Oni attended Georgetown University in Washington, DC, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Global Health in 2018.

Dr. Oni knew she wanted to be a physician since the age of 7, primarily due to the influence of her father, who trained

as a physician in Nigeria. During her undergraduate studies, she reaffirmed her decision to pursue medicine because of her desire to be part of the physician workforce and address the vast disparities she saw affecting marginalized communities domestically and abroad.

Currently, Dr. Oni is attending a urology residency at the University of Maryland. For this residency program, Dr. Oni participated in an early match process and marked a milestone as the first black woman at UConn to match in urology. She is excited about this residency program and continuing to help marginalized communities.

Dr. Oni became involved with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs through her participation in the 2015 Health Disparities Clinical Summer Research Fellowship Program, the summer following her first year of college. “The program gave me the unique experience of doing health disparities research while gaining invaluable clinical shadowing experiences. I benefited so much from this program as a pre-med student. When it came time to select a medical school, I could not forget the commitment to diversifying medicine and supporting students from underrepresented backgrounds that UConn and Health Career Opportunity Programs had already demonstrated. I felt confident that I would be supported here and gain the training necessary to become the culturally sensitive physician, who serves underserved communities, that I desire to be,” shares Dr. Oni.

Dr. Oni’s best Health Career Opportunity Programs experience was participating in the Health Disparities Clinical Summer Research Fellowship Program. Participation in this program was a major

reason for her to continue pursuing medicine as a career, as she saw physicians working at the intersection of medicine and public health. In addition to the basic sciences, she was able to see how the social sciences related to medicine. Through the program, she could spend summer evenings in Hartford at events together with other program participants. “It was a wonderful opportunity to meet students from around the country, many of whom are now my colleagues at UConn, and form friendships that have continued for many years,” states Dr. Oni.

Dr. Oni has also enjoyed her time serving as a mentor for the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy. She enjoyed getting to know her students over time and seeing the Class of 2021 apply to college and graduate from high school. Through this experience, she was able to see the value of mentorship and giving students advice, which is one of the things she wished she had in high school.

**“The program gave me the unique experience of doing health disparities research while gaining invaluable clinical shadowing experiences.”**

Additionally, Dr. Oni enjoyed her time being Co-President of the UConn Chapter of the Student National Medical Association (SNMA). Through SNMA, she formed a network of support at UConn and around the country. As an undergraduate student in the Minority Association of Pre-Medical Students, she was able to be better prepared as an applicant for medical school as she participated in the SNMA medical education conferences.

Dr. Oni leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: “As much as you can, do your best not to compare yourself to others. In medicine, it is incredibly hard not to compare when things can be so competitive, and your peers are so brilliant. Imposter syndrome is so real, and it can really break you down if you let it. Just remember that you are here for a reason. You deserve to be here. You have your own unique story and strengths.”

**NURUDEEN OSUMAH, MD, MBA**

Physician, Medical Student, Graduate Student, Mentor



Dr. Nurudeen Osumah graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2022.

Dr. Osumah attended Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biomedical Science with minors in Biology, Chemistry, and Microbiology in 2016.

The earliest memory of Dr.

Osumah's decision to pursue a career as a physician was around the age of 5 when his mother brought him to the hospital to meet the medical staff who cared for him when he was born. Afterward, he started glancing over books on medicine his parents had at home. Dr. Osumah adds, "My parents were my biggest supporters, constantly encouraging me to continue on my path. Throughout high school, I was fascinated with science classes, especially biology and human anatomy." He continued to focus on this interest in science which influenced his major in college.

During his third year of medical school, Dr. Osumah became interested in the metrics of patient outcomes through care, treatment, safety, and guidelines, so he decided to pursue a Master of Business Administration combined with his Doctor of Medicine degree. Currently, Dr. Osumah is attending an emergency medicine residency at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. "It is a blessing to remain at the institution that provided me with so many opportunities. I want to continue with mentoring in some capacity, working with medical and undergraduate students," shares Dr. Osumah. After residency, he is considering teaching and mentoring in academia or working in health administration to improve adverse health outcomes in patient health care.

Dr. Osumah became involved with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs during his undergraduate education when one of his professors informed him of the 2014 Summer Research Fellowship Program. "I wanted to remain fully involved and show my commitment to the program, which is why I returned for multiple programs leading up to my admission to UConn School of Medicine,"

shares Dr. Osumah. In 2015, Dr. Osumah participated in the Health Disparities Clinical Summer Research Fellowship Program, and in 2017 he participated in the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II-Basic Medical Sciences Program. While in medical school, Dr. Osumah served as a mentor for the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy, assisted with the Bridge to the Future Science Mentoring Conference, and was a tutor for the 2018 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track I-MCAT Preparation Program.

Dr. Osumah's best experience through the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs is his experience with the Doctors Academy on Saturdays during the academic year. "Instilling wisdom, experience, and knowledge into the next generation and seeing how receptive they are always makes my Saturdays. I enjoy providing the mentorship I wish I had in high school," shares Dr. Osumah.

**"Stay humble with your success, and pay it forward. Become a mentor who can help others throughout their academic journey."**

Dr. Osumah leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: "Obstacles in life are not the definition of failure but part of a journey to success. Continue to persevere and move forward, and you will realize just how far you have come. Have confidence in yourself and your abilities. Trust that you were chosen for a purpose in life. Stay humble with your success, and pay it forward. Become a mentor who can help others throughout their academic journey."

## **CARLA RIVERA PEREZ, MD**

Physician, Medical Student, Mentor



Dr. Carla Rivera Perez graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2022.

Dr. Carla Rivera Perez attended the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus in San Juan, Puerto Rico, for her undergraduate studies. In 2018, she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Cellular and Molecular Biology.

At the age of 16, Dr. Rivera Perez decided she wanted to become a doctor and, therefore, wanted to apply to medical school in the future. During her teen years, she was inspired by the healthy lifestyle advice given by her physician. She was inspired to become a physician to educate and inspire her own patients in the same way. “I was always really interested in the sciences and learning how things, especially the human body, worked,” states Dr. Rivera Perez.

Currently, Dr. Rivera Perez is attending a 4-year psychiatry residency at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai- Morningside West in New York. In the future, she plans to work at an academic institution affiliated with a medical school where she will be able to split her time between clinical activities and teaching residents or medical students. She wants to also give time to mentoring medical students who come from underrepresented backgrounds in medicine. Her exposure to the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs helped her make the decision to become a mentor to pay it forward to underrepresented students like herself.

Dr. Rivera Perez became involved with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs during the summers of her undergraduate studies. She completed the 2016 Summer Research Fellowship program, the 2017 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track I-MCAT Preparation, and lastly, the 2018 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II-Basic Medical Sciences Program the summer before starting as a student at UConn School of Medicine.

Being a part of Health Career Opportunity Programs has been a great experience for Dr. Rivera Perez. She has also enjoyed

meeting with students who visit the department and being an advocate of diversity as she sees it as enriching others to know more about different cultures. Furthermore, she was grateful to have the opportunity to give back and provide instruction, support, and guidance to students as a tutor for the 2019 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track I-MCAT Preparation. Additionally, she has enjoyed her experience with the Latino Medical Student Association. Starting the Spanish workshop and seeing that the current students are continuing this project is also rewarding to Dr. Rivera Perez.

**“Remember to enjoy your successes but also to learn from your failures and strive to come out even stronger!”**

Dr. Rivera Perez leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: “Pursuing a career in medicine is a long and tough road at times, but if the passion and drive are there, the journey is truly worth it. Remember to enjoy your successes but also to learn from your failures and strive to come out even stronger!”

**2022 BRIDGE MENTORING AWARD**

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs recognized two dental students and three medical students for their continued participation and involvement in the Aetna HPPI Programs with the Bridge Mentoring Award. The 2022 recipients were: Joshua Kwolek, DMD, general practice residency, Johnston Memorial Hospital-Foundry Dental Center, Bessemer, Alabama; Klair Lubonja, MD, surgery residency, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, Lebanon, New Hampshire; Paul Nwokeji, DMD, oral maxillofacial surgery residency, University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine, Farmington, Connecticut; Nurudeen Osumah, MD, MBA, emergency medicine residency, University of Connecticut School of Medicine, Farmington, Connecticut; and Carla Rivera Perez, MD, psychiatry residency, Mount Sinai Morningside West Hospital, New York, New York.



Joshua Kwolek, DMD



Klair Lubonja, MD



Paul Nwokeji, DMD



Nurudeen Osumah, MD, MBA



Carla Rivera Perez, MD

**CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR MENTORS AND PAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS**

2022 UConn Medical, Dental, and Graduate School Graduates

- |                                     |                              |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Suleiman Abiola, MD, MPH            | Ashleigh Moten, MD           |
| Christian-Adebayo Ayeni, DMD, Ph.D. | Paul Nwokeji, DMD            |
| Adeola Adeyeye, MD                  | Tijesunimi Oni, MD           |
| Christian Caceres, MD               | Nurudeen Osumah, MD, MBA     |
| Olivia Campbell, MD                 | Nanette Rivera Panzardi, DMD |
| Gabriel Colon, MD                   | Carla Rivera Perez, MD       |
| Xanthe Dimas, MD                    | Keino Robinson, MD           |
| Chase Foster-Spence, MD             | Veronica Schmidt, MD, MPH    |
| Miranda Garrett, MD                 | Elizabeth Serunjogi, MD      |
| Bhavin Gupta, DMD                   | Farah Themistocle, DMD       |
| Aaron Holmes, MD                    | Christian Watkins, DMD       |
| Zenon Kane, MD                      |                              |
| Klair Lubonja, MD                   |                              |
| Michaela Matos, DMD                 |                              |



Tijesunimi Oni, MD

**2022 OUTSTANDING STUDENT AWARD**

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs recognized a member of the Class of 2022 for outstanding performance throughout their professional education. The 2022 recipient was Tijesunimi Oni, MD, urology residency program, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

## Medical and Dental Award Recipients



Veronica Schmidt, MD, MPH



Tijesunimi Oni, MD



Breanna Irizarry, DMD



Paul Nwokeji, DMD

### **STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS 2022 EXEMPLARY SERVICE AWARDS**

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs and the UConn Chapters of the Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA), Student National Medical Association (SNMA), and Student National Dental Association/Hispanic Student Dental Association (SNDA/HSDA) recognized medical and dental student members of the Class of 2022 for their exemplary service. The LMSA recipient was Veronica Schmidt, MD, MPH, family medicine residency, WellSpan Health York Hospital, York, Pennsylvania. The SNMA recipient was Tijesunimi Oni, MD, urology residency, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland. The SNDA/HSDA recipients were Breanna Irizarry, DMD, oral maxillofacial surgery residency, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, and Paul Nwokeji, DMD, oral maxillofacial surgery residency, University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine, Farmington, Connecticut. Additionally, the UConn Chapters of the Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA) and the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) also recognized faculty members for their service to the student organizations. The 2022 LMSA faculty award recipient was Rocio Chang, MA, PsyD, and the 2022 SNMA faculty award recipients were Lenworth Ellis, MD, and Lenora Williams, MD.

## Faculty Award Recipients



Rocio Chang, MA, PsyD



Lenworth Ellis, MD



Lenora Williams, MD



**SENIOR DOCTORS ACADEMY GRADUATING CLASS OF 2022**



**Arianna Acevedo**  
Manchester Community College



**Yusuf Allam**  
Central Connecticut State University



**Najay Campbell**  
University of Connecticut



**Praneet Dangol**  
University of Connecticut



**Rafy Diaz**  
Central Connecticut State University



**Analyees Hill**  
Southern Connecticut State University



**Nikay Jones**  
Johns Hopkins University



**Day'Avian Mayo**  
University of Connecticut



**Kwaku Nyame**  
University of Connecticut



**Tamia Percy**  
Eastern Connecticut State University



**Sanyu Ponnala**  
University of Connecticut



**Ciara Solivan**  
University of New Haven



**Amayah Wimberly-Whaley**  
University of Connecticut

## THE JOHN AND VALERIE ROWE SCHOLARSHIP



**John Rowe, MD and Valerie Rowe, Ph.D.**

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs provides John & Valerie Rowe Scholarships in the form of book awards to Senior Doctors Academy students from the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy who will enroll as freshmen at UConn. Dr. John D. Rowe and Dr. Valerie A. Rowe, are long-time donors to UConn, supporting students and

institutional advancement. The Rowe Health Professions Scholars Program Endowment has helped hundreds of students from underrepresented populations succeed in UConn’s undergraduate, medical, and graduate programs through scholarships, academic, and experiential opportunities.

Dr. John Rowe is a professor of health policy and management at Columbia University and former chairman and CEO of Aetna,

Inc. He previously served on the UConn Board of Trustees and the UConn Health Board of Directors. Dr. John Rowe was awarded the Carole and Ray Neag Medal of Honor for his remarkable contributions to medicine and UConn Health in 2012. Dr. Valerie Rowe is a retired clinical associate professor at the Graduate School of Education at Fordham University.

The 2022 John and Valerie Rowe Scholarships were awarded to Kwaku Nyame, Sanyu Ponnala, and Amayah Wimberley-Whaley. The scholarships were awarded to each recipient by Dr. Marja Hurley, UConn Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, professor of medicine and orthopaedic surgery, associate dean for Health Career Opportunity Programs, and founding director of Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative.

### 2022 John & Valerie Rowe Scholarship Recipients



**Kwaku Nyame**



**Sanyu Ponnala**



**Amayah Wimberley-Whaley**

### 2022 Boake L. Plessy Scholarship Recipient



**Praneet Dangol**

## BOAKE L. PLESSY, PH.D. SCHOLARSHIP



In honor of Dr. Boake Plessy’s contributions, UConn Health has established a scholarship fund that is used to support educational enhancement for students who participated in the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy and are planning to continue their education at the post-secondary level.

The Friends of the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs – 2022 Boake L. Plessy, Ph.D. Scholarship was awarded to Praneet Dangol at the Academic Year Closing and Recognition Ceremony. Mr. Dangol is attending UConn in this Fall.

To contribute to the Boake L. Plessy, Ph.D. Scholarship Fund or for more information about philanthropy to support the Health Career Opportunity Programs at UConn Health, please visit [health.uconn.edu/hcop](http://health.uconn.edu/hcop).

## **AETNA HPPI DOCTORS ACADEMY**

The Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative Doctors Academy (Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy) is designed to provide mentoring and educational opportunities that may otherwise not be available to many Connecticut middle and high school students. The Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy consists of the Great Explorations program, the Jumpstart 9 and 10 programs, and the Junior and Senior Doctors Academies. The purpose of the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy programs is to provide access and to prepare students interested in health professions who come from backgrounds where they are the first in their family to earn a four-year degree, come from modest family means, or are from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in health care. Students participating in the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy are generally recruited from the Hartford area schools and strive to become physicians, dentists, biomedical research scientists, pharmacists, nurses, and other health professionals.

The Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy has two major components: the summer program and the academic year program. The summer and academic year programs are designed to advance students' academic skill levels in math, science, and English. The programs promote personal growth through extracurricular experiences designed to help students develop the skills necessary to succeed in the Pre-Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). A total of 69 students participated in the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy virtual program during the 2021-2022 academic year, and 57 students participated in the virtual program during the 2022 summer.

During the 2021-2022 academic year and 2022 summer, the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy participated in mentoring activities focused on college preparation, health professions, relevant health topics, and scientific research hosted by undergraduate students in the UConn Rowe Health Professions Scholars Program; medical students in the UConn chapters of the Latino Medical Student Association and the Student National Medical Association; and UConn Health Ph.D. graduate students. Additionally, the members of the Junior and Senior Doctors Academies took part in a mentorship program with practicing health professionals and scientists hosted by Dr. Brendan Dolan, a general dentist, and alumnus of the UConn School of Dental Medicine.

## **PARENTAL SEMINAR SERIES**

The Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative's Parental Seminar Series is an opportunity for our Doctors Academy students and parents to learn more about important health issues affecting their community and important tips to prepare for college. Parents are asked to submit a survey on the topics they are most interested in learning about, and the series of lectures are then tailored to their needs. The 2021-2022 Parental Seminar Series commenced with a college admissions and financial aid panel. The panel included Ms. Caroline McCall, undergraduate admissions officer, University of Connecticut; Mr. Carlos Soler, assistant director of Admissions & Recruitment, Central Connecticut State University; and Ms. Kaylee Wright, M.Ed., assistant director of Admissions, University of Saint Joseph.

**Additionally, the Parental Seminar Series included presentations on different health topics.**



**Varalakshmi Niranjan,  
MD, MBA, FOMA, FACP**

A presentation on healthy eating and nutrition, *Food is Medicine* was given by Dr. Varalakshmi Niranjan, an assistant professor of Medicine in the Division of Internal Medicine and a primary care physician at UConn Health.



**Ireon LeBeauf,  
Ph.D., MD**

Another topic of interest was *Stress and Anxiety Management* presented by Dr. Ireon LeBeauf, a psychiatry resident at UConn Health.

**DOCTORS ACADEMY REUNION**

On Saturday, April 2, 2022, the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy celebrated a virtual reunion and special mentoring event sponsored by the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs. Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy alumni were able to reunite and discuss their career pathways since graduating from the Doctors Academy, answer questions, and advise current Doctors Academy participants. The event facilitators were Tiffany Addy, Senior Doctors Academy Class of 2019, UConn Class of 2023; and Wesia Malik, Senior Doctors Academy Class of 2017, UConn Class of 2021, and UConn School of Dental Medicine Class of 2026. The event began with a warm welcome by Dr. Granville Wrensford, assistant dean and associate director of Health Career Opportunity Programs, UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine followed by opening remarks given by Dr. Marja Hurley, Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, professor of Medicine and Orthopaedic Surgery, associate dean of Health Career Opportunity Programs, founding director of Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative, UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine.

The event included Doctors Academy alumni who acted as event moderators and panelists for breakout sessions focused on college preparation and career exploration, as well as a scholar-athlete panel: Lucia Duenas-Bianchi, UConn medical student Class of 2025; Dr. Gian Grant-McGarvey, UConn Family Medicine Resident; John Garcia, Frank H. Netter MD School of Medicine Class of 2024; Syed Ali, University Saint Joseph Class of 2024; Joseph Annan-Kingsley, UConn Class of 2024; Dr. Faith Crittenden, Yale-New Haven Hospital Pediatric Resident; Donald Derello, Johns Hopkins University Class of 2025; Preeya Diana, UConn Class of 2024; Sabrina Green, Rochester Institute of Technology Class of 2025; Yasmin Mohamad, UConn Class of 2024; Quaniqua Polk, Winston Salem State University graduate student Class of 2024; Shanicka Reynolds, Frank H. Netter MD School of Medicine Class of 2022; and Julie-Ann Williams, UConn Class of 2023.

2022 Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy Reunion Participants



Tiffany Addy



Syed Ali



Joseph Annan-Kingsley



Faith Crittenden, MD



Donald Derello



Preeya Diana



Lucia Duenas-Bianchi



John Garcia



Gian Grant-McGarvey, MD



Sabrina Green



Wesia Malik



Yasmin Mohamad



Quaniqua Polk



Shanicka Reynolds



Julie-Ann Williams

## HIGH SCHOOL MINI MEDICAL/DENTAL SCHOOL SEMINAR SERIES

The High School Mini Medical/Dental School Seminar Series offers eight weekly lectures and demonstrations presented by faculty members of the UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine. The 2022 seminar series held virtually included topics in medicine, dental medicine, and biomedical research. Eighty-six Connecticut high school juniors and seniors participated in the 2022 program.

Participants are selected by their school guidance counselors or science teachers. All students have shown a strong interest in pursuing careers in medicine, dental medicine, or the biological sciences. For more information, contact Anastasia Rollins at 860-679-3484 or rollins@uchc.edu.

### 2022 High School Mini Medical/Dental School Seminar Series Speakers and Topics



**Liisa Kuhn, Ph.D.**  
Biomaterials Research



**Ian McNeill, MD**  
Neurosurgery



**Donna Paoella, DMD**  
BA/BS-DMD Combined Degree Program



**Thomas Regan, MD**  
BA/BS-MD Combined Degree Program



**Jason Ryan, MD, MPH**  
Cardiology



**Belachew Tessema, MD**  
Otolaryngology



**Flavio Uribe, DMD, MDentSc**  
Orthodontics



**George Weinstock, Ph.D.**  
Adventures in Genomics



**Riqiang Yan, Ph.D.**  
Neuroscience

## HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT RESEARCH APPRENTICE PROGRAM

Three Senior Doctors Academy students had the opportunity to be a part of a research team from UConn Health in the 2022 High School Student Research Apprentice Program to develop a project in the biomedical sciences with topics in regeneration engineering through small molecular compounds, cardiac exosomes in myocardial repair and regeneration, and dynamic behavioral analysis for pain assessment. The 2022 summer program was held

virtually for four weeks as a component of the Senior Doctors Academy. The students also participated in virtual presentations on Research Training & Responsible Conduct by Environmental Health & Safety, and a virtual UConn Health clinical simulation tour. At the end of the summer, the students gave oral presentations of their research results during a special virtual research symposium.

## PRE-COLLEGE ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

The Pre-College Enrichment Program is a residential enrichment program primarily for incoming first year students at UConn. Designed to provide solid development of scientific, mathematical, communications, problem solving, and test-taking skills, it is intended to enhance the preparedness of college freshmen. It allows the students to experience life on a college campus at UConn Storrs prior to their matriculation to college in the fall. Students participate in the academic track (completion of academic courses) in collaboration with the UConn School of Engineering BRIDGE Program at Storrs.

For the summer 2022 program, four Pre-College Enrichment Program participants also engaged in numerous virtual enrichment

activities through UConn Health including a medical and dental student panel, a UConn Health Medical Faculty seminar, and a clinical simulation tour. The moderator of the medical panel was Dr. Marja Hurley, UConn Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, professor of Medicine and Orthopaedic Surgery, associate dean. Health Career Opportunity Programs, founding director, Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative. The medical faculty panelists included Dr. Lenworth Ellis, assistant professor of Medicine; Dr. Camelia Lawrence, assistant professor of Surgery at UConn Health and Breast Disease at Hartford Health Care; Dr. Hardeep Singh, assistant professor of Orthopaedic Surgery; and Dr. Lenora Williams, assistant professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

## 2022 Pre-College Academic Enrichment Program Medical Panel on Careers in Medicine “Why I Chose My Specialty”



**Marja Hurley, MD**  
Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery



**Lenworth Ellis, MD**  
Medicine



**Camelia Lawrence, MD, FACS**  
Breast Disease



**Hardeep Singh, MD**  
Orthopaedic Surgery



**Lenora Williams, MD**  
Obstetrics & Gynecology

## MEDICAL/DENTAL PREPARATORY PROGRAM

Medical/Dental Preparatory Program students, including Aetna Health Professions Pipeline participants, are selected from various universities throughout the United States to work on academic skills to prepare for medical school or dental school admission. Participants of the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track I prepare for either the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) or the Dental Admission Test (DAT), while the participants of the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II take courses in the basic medical sciences (BMS) to prepare them for the first-year curriculum of medical and dental school. A total of 47 college students and recent college graduates participated in virtual academic classes, seminars, workshops, test-taking strategies,

and other enrichment activities during the six-week summer 2022 program. Students enrolled in the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program enjoyed a series of virtually held seminars presented by 16 UConn Health faculty and enrolled students from June 21 through July 29, 2022. The Summer Seminars Series topics included medical and dental specialties, professionalism, and basic science and translational research. The participating students appreciated personal anecdotes and reflections by faculty. They were able to engage in each seminar by communicating directly with faculty; obtaining insight in medicine, dentistry, and biomedical sciences; and finding new mentors.

2022 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Seminar Series Speakers and Topics



**Kwame Amankwah, MD, MSc,  
FACS, FSVS, RPVI**  
Vascular Surgery



**Biree Andemariam, MD**  
Sickle Cell Disease



**Angela Bermúdez-Millán,  
Ph.D., MPH**  
Household Food Insecurity



**Brandon Byrd,  
MD/Ph.D. Candidate**  
Research



**Shontreal Cooper, MD**  
Obstetrics and Gynecology



**Eliane Dutra, DDS, MSD, Ph.D.**  
Craniofacial Morphogenesis  
and Cartilage Function



**Marja Hurley, MD**  
Osteoarthritis



**Liisa Kuhn, Ph.D.**  
Biomaterials



**Thomas Regan, MD**  
Professionalism



**Gualberto Ruano, MD, Ph.D.**  
Personalized Medicine



**Jason Ryan, MD, MPH**  
Cardiology



**Vanessa Scanlon, Ph.D.**  
Regenerative Medicine &  
Skeletal Biology



**Tannin Schmidt, Ph.D.**  
Basic and Translational  
Research



**Ezigobiara Umejiego,  
MD Candidate**  
Research



**Beiyang Zhou, Ph.D.**  
Immunology

## BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE SCIENCE MENTORING CONFERENCE

The 2022 Bridge to the Future Science Mentoring Conference was held virtually on Saturday, April 9, with approximately 30 college students participating. The students were brought together with UConn Health faculty, staff, medical, dental, and graduate students to interact in a series of activities to raise awareness about health and biomedical science careers and the admissions process for medical, dental, and graduate schools. The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs, the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative Fund, the Friends of the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs Fund, and the John and Valerie Rowe Health Professions Scholars Program Fund sponsored this year's conference. The keynote speaker, Dr. Sherene Mason, UConn School of Medicine class of 2006 graduate, Division Health of Nephrology, Connecticut Children's Medical Center, director of Dialysis and Apheresis Services, Robert R. Rosenheim Endowed Chair of Nephrology, assistant professor of Pediatrics, UConn School of Medicine, gave an inspirational message to students.

The virtual Bridge to the Future Science Mentoring Conference included an Admissions Panel, a Scholar-Athlete Panel, and a Medical and Dental Student Panel. College students learned about the admissions process for medical, dental, and graduate school programs offered at UConn Health. There were also concurrent sessions that included a Dental Impressions Workshop and workshops on Medical Specialties and Research. For college students specifically interested in dental medicine, the Dental Impressions Workshop led by Dr. Sarita Arteaga, professor of Craniofacial Sciences and associate dean for Students for the UConn School of Dental Medicine, and members of the Student National Dental Association/Hispanic Student Dental Association, included information on a career in dental medicine and more information about dental school admissions. For college students specifically interested in a career in medicine, members of the Student National Medical Association gave an interactive workshop on various medical specialties. For college students specifically interested in research, Dr. Vanessa Scanlon, assistant professor, Center for Regenerative Medicine and Skeletal Biology, UConn Health, presented the research workshop, *Science is Our Blood: Exploring Factors That Influence Fate*.

Conference participants also received advice from scholar-athletes on balancing academics and athletics and successful matriculation to medical, dental, and other professional schools. The nine panelists participating in the Scholar-Athlete session consisted of a UConn Storrs alumnus who is an anesthesiologist and current UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine students, representing sports such as baseball, basketball, cheerleading, football, lacrosse, soccer, swimming and diving, and track and field. The session

also included a video from a UConn Storrs scholar-athlete alumna who is a veterinarian. In addition to the Scholar-Athlete Panel, the conference included the Medical and Dental Student Panel where enrolled UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine students shared their personal anecdotes about their progression through their respective schools and allowed the college students to ask questions.

### Keynote Speaker



**Sherene Mason, MD, M.B.A.,** completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Connecticut and earned a dual MD and Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Connecticut School of Medicine (UConn SOM) in 2006. She later studied at Yale in General Pediatrics where she was elected as Pediatric Chief Resident in 2009-2010. As a Pediatric resident she was awarded funding by the American Academy of Pediatrics to design and implement an empowerment program for the families of the Yale Primary Care Center for Pediatrics. Further training at Yale University School of Medicine resulted in her subspecialty practice as a board-certified pediatric nephrologist. During her fellowship Dr. Mason completed research examining pathways important in renal tubular repair following renal injury. She was awarded the American Society of Pediatric Nephrology Fellow's Research Award in Basic Science for her work.

She is currently Division Head of Nephrology, director of Dialysis and Apheresis Services, and Robert R. Rosenheim Endowed Chair of Nephrology at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, and assistant professor of Pediatrics at the UConn SOM where she has helped to shape the career of future physicians. She is committed to advancing the knowledge in childhood kidney diseases, co-authoring several peer-reviewed journal articles and, most recently a chapter on childhood lupus nephritis (LN) in an international textbook on pediatric kidney disease. She is a recipient of the Childhood Arthritis and Rheumatology Research Alliance (CARRA) grant to further clinical research in childhood LN. Her research interests also include health disparities in the delivery of and access to care.



## **AETNA HEALTH PROFESSIONS PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE 2021-2022** **ACADEMIC YEAR DOCTORS ACADEMY CLOSING CEREMONY**

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs virtually held its annual Academic Year Closing and Recognition Ceremony for the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative (Aetna HPPI) Doctors Academy on May 18, 2022. The Aetna HPPI is an education consortium offering a comprehensive program of educational enrichment and support activities to increase the competitive applicant pool of diverse students interested in careers in the health professions.

This Academic Year Closing and Recognition Ceremony marked the culmination of a very positive academic year enrichment experience for middle and high school students from the Greater Hartford area who participated in the Great Explorations, Jumpstart, and Junior and Senior Doctors Academies. Welcoming remarks were given by Dr. Marja Hurley, UConn Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, professor of Medicine and Orthopaedic Surgery, associate dean, Health Career Opportunity Programs, founding director, Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative, UConn Health. Greetings were also given to the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy participants and their parents/guardians by Dr. Bruce Liang, Interim Chief Executive Officer, UConn Health, Executive Vice President for Health Affairs, dean, UConn School of Medicine, Ray Neag Distinguished Professor of Cardiovascular Biology and Medicine. The keynote speaker was State Representative Edwin Vargas, Jr., Deputy Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives, and Representative of the 6th Assembly District, who encouraged the Doctors Academy participants to continue to achieve their goals. Student reflections were given by Najay Campbell, Senior Doctors Academy Class of 2022; Rafy Diaz, Senior Doctors Academy Class of 2022; Day'Avian Mayo, Senior Doctors Academy Class of 2022; and Tiffany Addy Senior Doctors Academy Class of 2019 graduate, University of Connecticut Class of 2023. Ms. Deborah Cruz, a parent of a Doctors Academy participant, also gave an inspiring message about how her daughter and the other Doctors Academy participants have benefitted from the program over the years.

The evening's festivities also included Special Recognition Awards to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of Great Explorations, Jumpstart, and the Junior Doctors Academy participants. The recipients of these awards were: Zoe Addy and Maya Tuning of Great Explorations; Isabelle Pastrana and Javel Stewart of Jumpstart 9; Zion Gaynor, Isabella Rosa, and Valerie Rosa of Jumpstart 10; and Jahnyah Lumpkin of the Junior Doctors Academy. All the Senior Doctors Academy graduates are furthering their education at colleges and universities, with six enrolling at UConn. Kwaku Nyame, Sanyu Ponnala, and Amayah Wimberley-

Whaley were each awarded the John and Valerie Rowe Scholarship Award, and Praneet Dangol was awarded the Friends of the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs – Boake L. Plessy, Ph.D. Scholarship Award. Additionally, the family of Abigail Mathew and the family of Imani Laporte, students participating in the Doctors Academy, were recognized for their participation in the 2021-2022 Parental Seminar Series.

### Keynote Speaker



**Deputy Speaker Edwin Vargas, Jr.** was elected to the Connecticut General Assembly in 2012 to represent Hartford's 6th Assembly District in the House of Representatives.

Edwin Vargas, Jr. is a lifelong educator who has been active in political, civil rights, labor, civic, and public policy circles. He was born in Brooklyn, N.Y. of Puerto Rican parents. Mr. Vargas was a teacher in the Hartford public schools for 35 years.

Mr. Vargas has served in numerous national leadership roles, including Acting Chair of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Human and Civil Rights Committee; member of the AFT's K through 12 Program and Policy Committee; member of the National Democratic Party's Credentials Committee with the late Gov. Ella Grasso and Public Policy Chair of the Washington, DC-based National Puerto Rican Coalition.

At the local and regional levels, Mr. Vargas has served as Lead Teacher at the Hartford Adult School, President of the Greater Hartford Labor Council AFL-CIO, President of the Hartford Federation of Teachers, Vice President of AFT Connecticut, and as Chair of the Hartford Democratic Town Committee. He has served on the board of the United Way and is actively involved with the Barry Square NRZ. Vargas has been a consultant and advisor to many governmental, business, and nonprofit organizations, including serving a five-year term as an official advisor to the Governor of Puerto Rico on issues affecting the US-based Puerto Rican community.

Most recently, Mr. Vargas has served as a commissioner of planning and zoning for the City of Hartford, a position he held for over ten years.

## Medical Alumna Speaker



**Ayibatari 'Tari' Sikpi, MD**, is a native of Connecticut. Prior to entry into medical school, Dr. Sikpi earned her Bachelor of Science in Neuroscience and minors in Chemistry and Sociology from the University of Pittsburgh. During high school, she participated in the UConn Health Career Opportunity Programs, Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative, High School Student Research

Apprentice Program at Central Connecticut State University in the summer of 2009, and during her undergraduate studies, she participated in the Clinical Summer Research Fellowship Program the summer of 2011. After her graduation from the University of Pittsburgh, Dr. Sikpi matriculated at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. During her medical school career, Dr. Sikpi was active in mentoring youth who aspired to health professional careers. Upon medical school graduation in May 2018, she did her residency at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, where she completed her general psychiatry residency. During Dr. Sikpi's time in Charleston, she continued mentoring a local high school student and led a monthly residency discussion group exploring the intersection of psychiatry with various topics, including race, sexuality, and politics. After residency, Dr. Sikpi returned to Connecticut as a Clinical Fellow at Yale University School of Medicine, Child Study Center.

## Keynote Speaker



**Kenneth Alleyne, MD, FAAOS**, is a board-certified sports medicine orthopaedic surgeon practicing in Connecticut and Manhattan. He is an attending surgeon across multiple hospital systems and has held faculty appointments domestically and internationally. His primary clinical and research focus is in the areas of sports medicine, knee and shoulder surgery, and regenerative medicine.

He has served and continues to serve as a physician to athletes from school-age children to those in Olympic and professional competition, including the NFL, NBA, and the Track and Field team. Having been raised to strongly believe in the concept *from whom much is given, much is expected*, Dr. Alleyne has had a strong commitment to his community, specifically in the area of health, education, and the arts. He currently serves as Chair of the Connecticut Health Foundation, Connecticut's largest health philanthropy, with over 150 million dollars focused on grant-making toward systems change and health equity. Additionally, he serves on the boards of UConn Health, Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation, Student Achievement through

## FACULTY RECOGNITION AWARD

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs recognized two UConn Health faculty for



**Liisa Kuhn, Ph.D.**



**Cato Laurencin, MD, Ph.D.**

their outstanding and exceptional service at the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative (Aetna HPPI) 2022 Summer Programs Closing Ceremony. The 2022 Outstanding Faculty Recognition Award recipients were Liisa Kuhn, Ph.D., associate professor, Biomedical Engineering, and Cato Laurencin, MD, Ph.D., University Professor & CEO, Connecticut Convergence Institute for Translation in Regeneration Engineering. The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs acknowledges Dr. Kuhn's and Dr. Laurencin's dedication and efforts to the training of future health professionals and biomedical scientists in the Aetna HPPI pipeline through research activities and seminars over the years in the High School Mini Medical/Dental School Seminar Series, the High School Student Research Apprentice Program, and the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program.

Opportunity, and Connecticut Public Radio and Television. He is the managing partner of HartHaven Partners, a health care investment and consulting firm leveraging a panel of clinicians and scientists for the private equity and venture capital communities. His commitment to serving the needs of diverse populations with value-based, equity-focused solutions has been the lens for most of his investment work. The most recent results of these investments have been Next Level Health Partners, a Medicaid managed care organization in the Midwest, Zing Health care, a technology-enabled Medicare Advantage Health Plan, and Virtual Health, a leading population health platform serving over 12 million U.S. lives for the payer community. He completed his undergraduate education at Williams College and medical training at Wake Forest University. Residency training was undertaken at Howard University Hospital and subsequently completed a fellowship in sports medicine, knee and shoulder surgery at Yale University, as well as a tissue engineering research fellowship at the Harvard-MIT Division of Health, Sciences and Technology under Dr. Cato Laurencin. He is an avid skier, jazz enthusiast, cyclist, gadget collector, and fan of his children's athletics. He is married to Shaun D. Biggers, MD, an obstetrician and gynecologist.

## DIVERSIFYING MEDICINE

By Lauren Woods, UConn Health

UConn School of Medicine's class size has grown in recent years by 30 percent, and so has its diversity. As we celebrate this February Black History Month, learn more about how UConn has been a national leader in increasing underrepresented groups in medicine, especially

Black Americans. As UConn School of Medicine's class size has grown, so has its diversity. UConn has been leading the way forward for nearly two decades with successful strides to increase underrepresented groups in medicine, especially Black Americans.



**Suleiman Abiola holds a stethoscope gift given to each medical student by alumni from the UConn School of Medicine. November 23, 2020 (Tina Encarnacion/UConn Health photo)**

UConn School of Medicine was named by U.S. News & World Report as one of the top 10 medical schools in the nation for the diversity of its student body. Plus, in 2021 U.S. News Diversity Index ranked the UConn School of Medicine No. 26 for its diversity among all medical schools nationally. Among all public medical schools, UConn is ranked 13 out of 71 in the country for diversity.

"The Health Career Opportunity programs under the leadership of Dr. Marja Hurley have been a key initiative in diversifying the medical school student body, since more than 55% of the Black and Hispanic students who have matriculated to UConn School of Medicine came through this pipeline," said Dr. Bruce T. Liang, dean of UConn School of Medicine and newly appointed interim CEO of UConn Health since the start of Black History Month on February 1.

Black medical students represent 11.8% of the student body, well above the longstanding national average of 6% to 7%. Further, the School's population of underrepresented individuals in medicine has steadily grown to nearly 23%. For more than a decade, the school has maintained its overall percentage of Black students and has doubled the number of Black men enrolled.

"Diversity is incredibly important to us not only today but also for the future as we advance medicine academically, clinically, and scientifically," said Liang. "The lack of African Americans and other underrepresented minorities choosing to enter the fields of medicine and research is a critical and longstanding national issue."

## SEVEN SOON-TO-BE DOCTORS GET AN EARLY RESIDENCY MATCH

Excerpt of article written by Lauren Woods, UConn Health

Seven fourth-year medical students at UConn School of Medicine participated in the early match process finding out where they get to spend their advanced residency training over the next several years. The students entering the medical fields of urology, ophthalmology, and the military are UConn's largest early-match class.



**During this February's Black History Month fourth-year medical student TJ Oni celebrating her historic early-match as the first woman from UConn to ever be matched to a urology residency with her Health Career Opportunity Program (HCOP) mentor Dr. Marja Hurley, also a trailblazer as the first black woman to graduate from UConn medical school (UConn Health photo/Tina Encarnacion).**

Also, early-matching to urology but at the University of Maryland is Tijesunimi Oni, 25 from Woodbury, New Jersey. She was part of the Health Career Opportunity Programs (HCOP) at UConn Health and mentored by its leader Dr. Marja Hurley. "Tijesunimi Oni is making history. She is the first black woman at UConn to match into a urology residency," Hurley proudly shared during this February's Black History Month.

"I am very excited to have matched in urology," Oni says. "I am entering urology because it is a surgical specialty that blends medical and surgical management of patients. In my third-year clinical rotations, I realized that I loved being in the OR operating, but I also wanted to be able to form long-term relationships with my patients." Oni stresses: "What I have loved most about my time at UConn SOM are the people."

"Congrats to all our early-matching medical students," said Dr. Melissa Held, associate dean for medical student affairs. "We are so proud of all of you." And the excitement of these early-matchers is a preview of even more excitement to come at the strike of noon on March 18 for National Match Day. Until then, their medical school classmates entering advanced training for primary care and other medical specialties will be anxiously awaiting their residency destinies.

The Class of 2022 will graduate this May as part of UConn Health's 51st graduating class carrying on the now more than 50-year tradition of UConn being the No. 1 producer in Connecticut of future physicians, surgeons, and dentists and a great source of future scientists and public health experts.

## **TRAILBLAZER AND CHANGEMAKER OF YOUNG PEOPLES' LIVES: DR. MARJA HURLEY**

*Excerpt of article written by Lauren Woods, UConn Health*

In celebration of Black History Month, we honor trailblazer and inspiring physician-scientist Dr. Marja M. Hurley, the first woman of color to graduate from the School of Medicine in 1976. Learn how for decades, she's been inspiring the next generation of doctors and scientists.

Dr. Marja M. Hurley was the first woman of color to graduate from UConn School of Medicine in 1976 and the first to become a tenured full professor. UConn named the pioneering physician-scientist one of its most outstanding women of its first 100 years. Recently, Hurley was the first Black woman to be appointed a UConn Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor.

While this trailblazer is renowned for her three decades of NIH-funded bone research, she is a mentor and inspiration for the next generation of physicians, dentists, and scientists. For two decades, her 14 distinct Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative-sponsored programs have been critical in getting more young people, of all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds interested in medicine and science, to enter medical, dental, and health schools, and ultimately to pursue health professions.

The programs have served as a continuous pathway for youth of diverse backgrounds to realize their dream of becoming future doctors, dentists, and health professionals. Impressively, of the nearly 900 youth in the Health Career Opportunity Programs so far, more than 600 have successfully gone on to enter medical, dental school, or other health profession schools and practice as providers in these fields.

"This program at UConn Health offers opportunities for some of our brightest students from all backgrounds to learn about the incredible opportunities available in the health professions," said Hurley. "We are very proud of the successes in growing the diversity of our student body and also building a greater pipeline for a more diverse future health care workforce."

One of the many inspiring Health Career Opportunity Programs students' success stories is from the Class of 2021's Faith Crittenden '14 (CLAS), 29, of Windsor.

She graduated from UConn with an undergraduate degree in chemistry and molecular and cell biology. She is now at Yale for her pediatric residency training, where she previously earned her health policy MPH.

"As I am about to enter the health care workforce as a Black pediatric resident, it has been 11 years since a Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) seed was planted in the classroom of my Connecticut public high school," says Crittenden, who believes the critical first step to getting more underrepresented minorities in the STEM field is to plant that seed early within the classroom, showing the students there are trailblazers just like them in these fields.

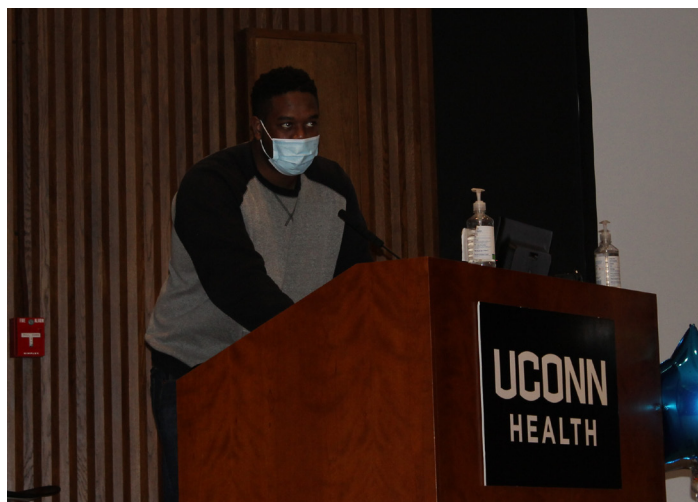
Hurley is the founding director and associate dean for the Health Career Opportunity Programs and professor of medicine and orthopaedics. At UConn she completed her undergraduate and medical degrees, internal medicine residency, and endocrinology fellowship training and joined the faculty in 1986.

## HEALTH CAREER OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS MEDICAL AND DENTAL STUDENTS

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs plays an integral role in recruiting diverse students from around the country to UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine and providing support for currently enrolled medical and dental students. At the beginning of each academic year, the department hosts a reception to welcome the first-year class. The 2021 Welcome Reception was held virtually on September 14 for the Class of 2025. This was an opportunity for first-year medical and dental students to learn more about: department resources, support services, and programs; UConn student organizations such as the Student National Medical Association (SNMA), the Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA), and the Student National Dental Association/Hispanic Student Dental Association (SNDA/HSDA); and research opportunities.

Over the four years of academic training, Health Career Opportunity Programs' medical and dental students can participate in seminars based on their career interests; engage with the broader community; coordinate hands-on activities for younger students; interact with visiting students, faculty, and community leaders; and mentor and tutor Aetna HPPI middle school, high school, and college students. The monthly Newslite, compiled and distributed by the department, also keeps students apprised of externships, fellowships, conferences, scholarships, and residency programs that they are eligible for. A key component of the department's mission is to foster mentorship of current medical and dental students by alumni of UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine and by current faculty to provide them with further guidance for their professional training. In doing so, a Health Career Opportunity Programs Alumni Seminar Series was instituted to cover various topics, from starting a practice to climbing the hierarchy in health care. The department has also established an online Alumni page to connect current students with alumni.

Additionally, the department continues to support the professional and cultural events of SNMA, LMSA, and SNDA/HSDA chapters and encourages student leadership at the university, regional, and national levels. These student organizations continue to be at the forefront of student life at UConn Health and the greater community. In the 2021- 2022 academic year, members of SNMA, LMSA, and SNDA/HSDA participated in virtual presentations to discuss health topics focused on nutrition, exercise, and oral care; and careers in medicine and dentistry with students of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Hartford.



The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs also celebrates the accomplishments of the UConn Medical and Dental Class of 2022. A Celebration was held on May 1st in Keller Auditorium at UConn Health to recognize the 2022 Health Career Opportunity Programs graduates, with a musical interlude provided by second-year medical student and violinist Patrick Bogui. Dr. Marja Hurley and the members of Health Career Opportunity Programs wish continued success to the graduates as they begin their residency programs and professional training. It is an honor to see their achievements as they continue to positively impact patient care, education, and research.

## **STUDENT NATIONAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION—UCONN HEALTH CHAPTER CULTURE SHOCK EVENT**

Each year the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) hosts Culture Shock, an event sponsored by the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs. The purpose of the event is to celebrate the diversity of the UConn Health community through performances, fashion, music, dance, and other artistic presentations. Participants enjoy a wide array of local and international cuisine through generous donations from many restaurants and medical and dental students at UConn Health. This year, Culture Shock was held on December 10, 2021, in UConn Health’s Keller Auditorium. Proceeds from the event were donated to the Urban League of Greater Hartford Young Professionals in Hartford, CT, and continue to benefit the mission and efforts of SNMA.

SNMA is a nationally run student organization whose mission is to “support current and future underrepresented minority medical students, to address the needs of underserved communities, and to increase the number of clinically excellent, culturally and socially conscious physicians.” “The Urban League of Greater Hartford Young Professionals organization was designed to provide young professionals (ages 21-40) in the Greater Hartford area with a forum that fosters professional development, community service, social awareness, equal access to opportunities, and self-reliance.” The ULGH-YP’s dedication to empowering young people is why the UConn Chapter of SNMA chose to donate to this organization. The UConn Chapter of SNMA continues to foster a strong relationship with ULGH-YP.



## **UCONN SCHOOLS OF MEDICINE AND DENTAL MEDICINE ALUMNI SPEAKER SEMINAR SERIES**

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs, together with the Student National Medical Association (SNMA), Student National Dental Association (SNDA)/Hispanic Student Dental Association (HSDA), and the Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA), coordinate the UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine Alumni Speaker Seminar Series events. The Alumni Seminar Series provides current UConn medical and dental students from the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs with an opportunity to learn more about various topics and experiences from our Health Career Opportunity Programs alumni currently in the health care professions. In the seminars, the medical and dental students can have an open conversation with the alumni guest speakers. Students ask questions, and the alumni guest speakers give information and advice on the topic chosen during the event.

The UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine 2022 Alumni Seminar Series was held virtually on Thursday, January 20, and Tuesday, March 29. The first seminar focused on the topic, *Climbing the Hierarchy*. The alumni guest speakers were Cynthia Armand, MD, and Damian Findlay, DMD, MD, FACS. Dr. Armand is an assistant professor of Neurology at Montefiore Medical Center, University Hospital for Albert Einstein College of Medicine in Bronx, New York. She is also the fellowship director and co-chair of the American Headache Society's (AHS) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Taskforce at the Montefiore Headache Center. Dr. Findlay is an associate surgeon at Oral Facial Surgical Institute and chief of the Division of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery at Mercy Hospital in Saint Louis, Missouri.

The second seminar focused on the topic, *How to Earn While Serving the Underserved*, with alumni guest speakers Kristen Glasgow, MD, and Johnny Joseph, DMD. Dr. Glasgow is an acute care surgeon at Bridgeport Hospital in Bridgeport, Connecticut, covering trauma, general surgery, burn surgery, and critical care. She is also Surgeon Champion for the National Surgical Quality Improvement Program. Dr. Joseph is a board-certified pediatric dentist and is the owner of Pediatric Dentistry Asleep P.C., a subspecialty pediatric dental office in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is also a faculty member at the University of Pittsburgh Children's Hospital and the University of the West Indies.

## Guest Speakers



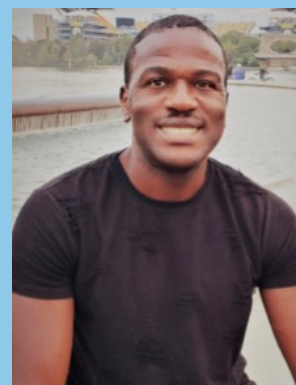
**Cynthia Armand, MD**



**Damian Findlay, DMD, MD, FACS**



**Kristen Glasgow, MD**



**Johnny Joseph, DMD**

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and commitment to the students

**For more information about the Pipeline Programs, visit us at  
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