

UConn HEALTH

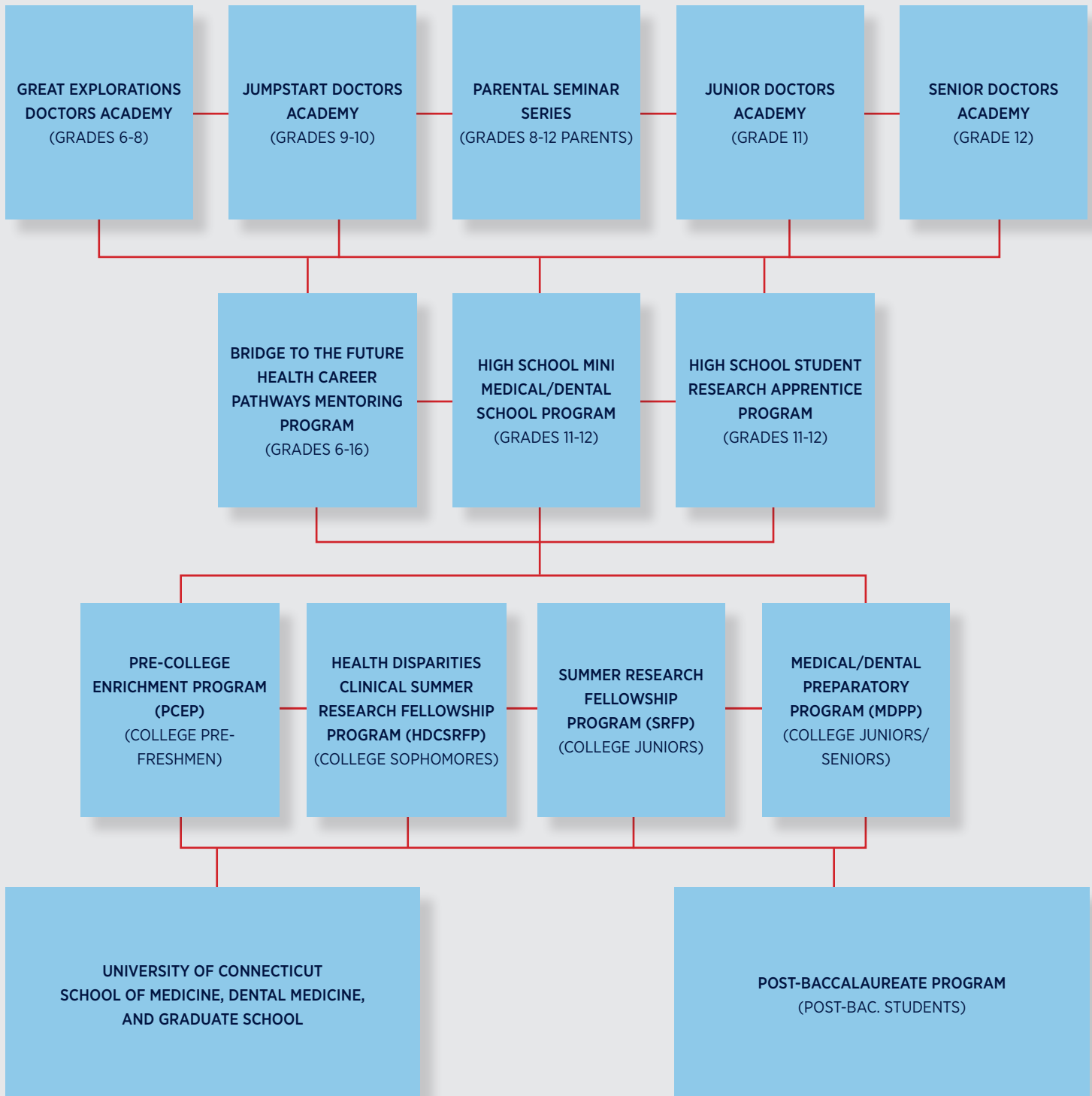
HEALTH CAREER
OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS



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Programs at: health.uconn.edu/hcop

OCTOBER 2024

AETNA HPPI PIPELINE



WELCOME FROM DR. MARJA HURLEY



Greetings from the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs which continues to play a vital role in diversifying the student body of the Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine at UConn Health. In view of the continuing health disparities in segments of our population, the goal of the Department is continued commitment to the recruitment,

retention, and graduation of diverse medical and dental students capable of providing culturally competent health care.

On July 19, we proudly celebrated 28 years of the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative (Aetna HPPI) during the 2024 Summer Closing Ceremony. Attorney Sanford Cloud, Jr., Chairman and CEO of The Cloud Company, LLC, served as our keynote speaker. Dr. Faith Crittenden, a pediatric endocrinology fellow at Yale New Haven Children's Hospital, a graduate of the UConn School of Medicine Class of 2021, and a former Aetna HPPI pipeline participant, served as our medical alumna speaker.

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 fourth year. 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 2024. In the SOM, 16% of the graduating class are Health Career Opportunity Programs scholars, while 8% of the graduating class in the SODM are Health Career Opportunity Programs scholars. We are also proud that 66% of the underrepresented in medicine students currently enrolled in the SOM are Aetna HPPI pipeline students, and 36% 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 continue to be 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 medicine and dental medicine in Connecticut or have embarked on careers in academic medicine or dental medicine.

We had 108 middle school, high school, and college students participate in our 2024 summer programs through the Aetna HPPI. During the 2024-2025 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 28 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. DANIELLE WATT



I am excited about what we have accomplished in my first year as the Associate Director especially with most of our programs transitioning to fully in-person. We applaud the Doctors Academy instructors, peer counselors, mentors, staff, volunteers, guest speakers, parents/guardians, and participants for their commitment to ensure another successful

program year. To highlight a few of the Doctors Academy's key activities: the academic year began with a college panel with representatives from Connecticut colleges and universities to discuss the admissions and financial aid process with participants and parents. Our partnership with the Connecticut Science Center provided opportunities for hands-on STEM enrichment through the Science and Engineering Fair, Operation Artery workshop, and Girls in Chemistry and Poetry workshop. We collaborated with area universities and institutions (UConn School of Pharmacy, Central Connecticut State University, University of Hartford, and The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine) to host our students for tours and lab experientials to expose them to various careers in health care and biomedical research. These visits complemented mentoring sessions with biomedical research professionals, graduate students, UConn alumni, and Doctors Academy alumni who focused on tips for academic success, preparing for college, professional or graduate school, financial literacy, and career readiness. Furthermore, students had special mentoring sessions with Dr. Brendan Dolan, a UConn School of Dental Medicine alumnus, who organized healthcare professional speakers and was honored for his dedication to the program at the closing ceremony. We concluded the academic year by honoring the graduating seniors, all of whom have been accepted to four-year colleges, and celebrating the achievements of the Doctors Academy scholars.



Over the summer, we expanded the art in science and health course with the Great Explorations (grade 8) and Jumpstart 9 programs, which included a tour of the New Britain Museum of American Art to emphasize the importance and connection between art and science. The participants used their knowledge of the structure and function of the heart to create artwork for the end-of-summer program heART Exhibit. Also, the Doctors Academy students in grades 10 – 12 participated in rotational internships to gain insight into healthcare careers by observing UConn Health professionals in dental medicine, operating room/surgical nursing, physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and respiratory services.

Our Great Explorations in-school/after-school program continued at West Middle School, Jumoke Academy Honors SMaRT, Jumoke Academy at Hartford Conservatory, Classical Magnet, Renzulli Academy, and two Boys and Girls Clubs of Hartford sites where students participated in six sessions focused on hands-on biology and chemistry activities. The High School Mini Medical/Dental School Program had over 90 students participate from 29 high schools in Hartford and New Haven counties. We will have the program continue virtually to increase the participation of students across the state to provide access and exposure to health care and research professionals. In addition to the high school programs, our Pre-College Academic Enrichment Program, two college summer research programs, and the Medical/Dental Preparatory Programs hosted participants from across the U.S., including Puerto Rico, to support their educational and professional pursuits.

I sincerely thank all our program participants, parents/guardians, department staff, UConn medical, dental, and graduate students, faculty, professional staff, volunteers, speakers, and institutional and community partners for contributing to the success of this year's programs. A special recognition to the members of the Student National Dental Association/Hispanic Student National Dental Association, Student National Medical Association, Latino Medical Student Association, Doctors Academy alumni, Dr. Kathy Martin-Troy and her Central Connecticut State University staff, and Dr. Stephany Santos and her UConn College of Engineering Vergnano Institute for Inclusion staff for supporting and partnering with our middle school, high school, and college programs.

Danielle Watt, Ph.D.

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

CONGRATULATIONS FROM DR. GERALD BIRMINGHAM



I am very happy to be part of a successful endeavor with the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative, focusing on training and mentoring students to become qualified health professionals who will serve in our communities of need, relating to health care and well-being. This summer of 2024, I mentored a group of college students preparing for the Dental Admission Test (DAT)

which they need to take before applying to dental schools. There were also students who were preparing for the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT); and others who were pursuing research opportunities in various labs, and they were able to present well thought-out poster presentations of their work. To all the students, I express my sincerest congratulations.

As we celebrate their achievements, we must always be vigilant into the “why” we are pursuing these memorable events. The simple answer is to fulfill our wants and ambitions of a wonderful life experience of service to ourselves and others in the communities we choose to work in.

I sincerely thank Dr. Hurley and her support staff for so much effort in the many programs, namely the Great Explorations, Jumpstart Program, Junior Doctors Academy, and Senior Doctors Academy. These programs secure an academic foundation for these students to excel in college and predoctoral institutions. So, as we celebrate today, may we feel obligated to the necessary outcome of the mission to create more health care providers to serve and upbuild our communities.

I wish to thank all our students for their continued focus and hard work, and to the professional staff members, institutional and community partners for their continued support to help make these programs successful each year.

Gerald Birmingham, DMD, MPH, MS, MAGD

Assistant Clinical Professor, General Dentistry
Assistant Director of Health Career Opportunity Programs
UConn School of Dental Medicine



GREETINGS FROM DR. KERRY-ANN STEWART



It is truly gratifying to witness the transition of our Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative (HPPI) pipeline participants to the next stage of their educational and professional pursuits. It was certainly a pleasure to congratulate the 2024 graduates of the Senior Doctors Academy as they begin their academic careers as undergraduate students, as well as the 2024 graduates of the

UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine as they proceed to residency programs or dental practice.

This past academic year, we continued to provide opportunities for Doctors Academy participants to learn engaging and innovative concepts to gain more exposure to the health professions as we returned to fully in-person programming. Through these enrichment events, we continued to expose the students to hands-on activities focused on health and the laboratory sciences.

Our participation in regional and national conferences, such as the Student National Medical Association Region VII Medical Education Conference and the Student National Medical Association Annual Medical Education Conference, allowed us to reach a large group of students from across New England and the U.S. who are interested in careers in medicine. Likewise, we expanded our connections



with Connecticut colleges and universities with in-person and virtual informational sessions and engaged with college students nationally through the virtual Pathways Research Symposium and virtual presentations to pre-health professions students at Spelman College and Xavier University of Louisiana.

We also continued our collaborations with the UConn Storrs and Hartford campuses through in-person networking and professional development events such as the Research Connections and Advice & Perspectives: Pre-Medical & Pre-Dental Career Conversation. It was also exciting to meet with members of the UConn Chapter of the Minority Association of Pre-medical Students and have them interact with Doctors Academy participants and receive mentorship by members of the UConn Chapter of the Student National Medical Association. We also extend our appreciation to our UConn medical, dental, and graduate students, who mentored high school and college students through the Aetna HPPI pipeline programs and through community outreach with organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs of Hartford on career paths in medicine, dental medicine, and the biomedical sciences.

This summer, the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program offered undergraduate students and recent college graduates the opportunity to prepare for medical or dental school admissions and gain more exposure to clinical medicine and dental medicine with practicing physicians and dentists. It was also wonderful to witness the outstanding research presentations given by the participants of the High School Student Research Apprenticeship Program, Health Disparities Clinical Summer Research Fellowship Program, and Summer Research Fellowship Program.

Seeing our middle school, high school, and college Aetna HPPI participants accomplish their goals is truly rewarding. I thank the UConn community for its continuous support of the Aetna HPPI programs. Our faculty, instructors, mentors, tutors, community partners, seminar speakers, and peer counselors continue to help make these programs a great success each year.

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

JEFFREY BOAKYE ASABERE, MD

Physician, Medical Student, Mentor



Dr. Jeffrey Boakye Asabere graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2024.

Dr. Boakye Asabere attended Philander Smith University in Little Rock, Arkansas, for his undergraduate education. In 2016, he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology.

Dr. Boakye Asabere's earliest memories of wanting to

become a physician were around the age of 12. He was very fascinated by his biology classes, where he learned about how the human body works. "Additionally, I had firsthand experiences accompanying my grandfather to medical appointments where I came to appreciate the pivotal role physicians played in enhancing his quality of life. My love for science and desire to improve health outcomes for others led me to medicine," shares Dr. Boakye Asabere.

In preparing for residency programs after medical school, Dr. Boakye Asabere participated in an early match in ophthalmology. He is currently attending an ophthalmology residency at the University of Rochester Flaum Eye Institute in Rochester, New York. His long-term aspirations involve pursuing a clinical and research fellowship focused on the Cornea. His goals of including research in his career as an aspiring physician-scientist stems from his previous research experiences, which include: a research fellowship at the National Institutes of Health before medical school and a research year during medical school at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary studying the role of UV-A and DNA damage in the pathogenesis of Fuchs Endothelial Corneal Dystrophy. Dr. Boakye Asabere further explains, "Beyond performing eye surgery and consulting patients in the clinic, I am interested in studying the mechanisms underlying ocular diseases, with a particular focus on identifying pharmacotherapeutic targets to improve vision, especially among underserved populations."

Dr. Boakye Asabere was introduced to the Health Career Opportunity Programs during the application cycle for medical school, which was one of the main factors that drew him to UConn School of Medicine.

"I remember meeting with Dr. Hurley during my interview day at UConn and learning about the Doctors Academy. I was impressed by the important work to bolster representation in medicine through early mentorship in a structured pipeline program. As the first in my family to attend medical school, I recognized the profound value of mentorship offered by programs like Health Career Opportunity Programs. I was eager to contribute as a mentor for high school students", reflects Dr. Boakye Asabere. "Additionally, my participation in the 2019 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II-Basic Medical Sciences Program provided invaluable support in transitioning to the rigorous demands of medical school, solidifying Health Career Opportunity Programs' integral role in my medical education journey at UConn", shares Dr. Boakye Asabere.

Dr. Boakye Asabere's favorite experience with Health Career Opportunity Programs has been mentoring middle and high school students as part of the Doctors Academy. He started with the Jumpstart 9 class and saw those students graduate from the Seniors Doctors Academy. During his final year of medical school, he mentored the 8th-grade students in the Great Explorations class. "I remember going through dissections of the sheep eye with the 8th graders and seeing so much excitement in the students about science and medicine. It has also been rewarding to witness the student's growth in the programs and subsequently matriculate into pre-health college programs", he shares.

"My love for science and desire to improve health outcomes for others led me to medicine."

Dr. Boakye Asabere leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: "The path to becoming a health professional can be rigorous, particularly without a close relative to look up to and seek guidance. It is important to actively seek out mentors and support at every step of your journey. Immersing yourself in programs like those offered through Health Career Opportunity Programs can provide invaluable guidance and bolster your progress along this challenging yet rewarding path".

ABIGAIL BOURSQUOT, MD

Physician, Medical Student, Mentor



Dr. Abigail Boursiquot graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2024.

Dr. Boursiquot attended McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Microbiology and Immunology in 2019.

As a child growing up, Dr. Boursiquot knew she wanted to become a doctor when she was four. She always looked forward to going to her own doctor’s office for checkups and those of her siblings and cousins. As she grew older, this decision to pursue a career as a physician was further reinforced by her desire to enter a profession where she could care for and support others. Through her own personal experience with a family member who was ill, Dr. Boursiquot learned how to support patients and families during difficult times.

Dr. Boursiquot is currently attending an obstetrics and gynecology residency program at Yale New Haven Hospital in New Haven, CT. She plans to practice obstetrics and gynecology in Connecticut in the future. Further expanding on her career goals, Dr. Boursiquot shares, “I am interested in academic medicine and would love to incorporate teaching and curricular development into my career.”

Dr. Boursiquot’s first experience with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs was through the 2020 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II-Basic Medical Sciences Program, which took place the summer before her first year of medical school started. “I was intrigued by the program and decided to participate to better prepare myself for the first year of medical school. It turned out to be an invaluable experience, and if I could go back in time, I would do it again and again!” she excitedly expresses.

Additionally, Dr. Boursiquot valued her time with Health Career Opportunity Programs as a mentor for the student participants of the Doctors Academy during the 2020-2021 academic year and the summer of 2021. Dr. Boursiquot relays this as her best experience with the department, as she shares, “Being a mentor and exposing

students in the Hartford Public School system and other Greater Hartford schools to STEM was a tremendous experience. I enjoyed working with my fellow mentors to develop lesson plans and organize fun activities to get the students engaged and interested in STEM and other health professions”. Likewise, Dr. Boursiquot enjoyed the Health Career Opportunity Programs sponsored welcome and graduation events in recognition of the medical and dental student classes held at the Pond House Café in West Hartford, Connecticut. “It was always nice to connect with fellow Health Career Opportunity Programs students and faculty over a formal dinner!” expresses Dr. Boursiquot.

“I enjoyed working with my fellow mentors to develop lesson plans and organize fun activities to get the students engaged and interested in STEM and other health professions.”

Dr. Boursiquot leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: “Never give up and give yourself grace during this very difficult journey. Pursuing a career in medicine can be a very long, arduous process, and you may encounter forces (finances, difficult exams, rejection, etc.) that try to steer you away from your path. If you truly believe this is your career path, don’t give up. Reach out to your peers and people who are further along the path than you and ask for help! There are so many people out there who are closer to the finish line who are willing to mentor and support the younger generation, including myself. Remember to be kind to yourself and have faith that everything will work out the way it’s supposed to.”

ASHLEY BRANDON, DMD

Dentist, Dental Student, Mentor



Dr. Ashley Brandon graduated from the UConn School of Dental Medicine in May 2024.

Dr. Brandon attended Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, where she graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biochemistry in 2020.

Dr. Brandon knew from an early age she wanted to pursue a career in healthcare. Her

earliest exposure to the health professions was through her mother, a registered nurse, who inspired Dr. Brandon through her passion and care for patients. She knew she wanted to go to dental school during middle and high school. Dr. Brandon’s participation in shadowing opportunities and pre-dental programs and connecting with her own dentist solidified her interest in a career in dentistry. For Dr. Brandon, dentistry offered a unique blend of patient interaction and technical expertise that appealed to her desire for meaningful connections with others. “Building rapport with patients, earning their trust, and guiding them on their journey to oral health becomes a source of fulfillment and purpose. Whether it’s calming a nervous patient’s fears or educating a child on the importance of brushing and flossing, dentists can impact individuals and communities alike,” states Dr. Brandon. She continues, “As I matured, I understood more and more that every smile is unique, just like every individual, and I wanted to provide a standard of care that not only addresses oral problems but also pours confidence and love into each patient, no matter what kind of smile they have. After all, there is no such thing as ‘the perfect smile’”, reflects Dr. Brandon.

Dr. Brandon is currently attending a general practice residency at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. For the future, Dr. Brandon is considering a career in private practice and/or with a community health center. “Working as a dentist in a community health center is not just a job; it’s a calling—a calling to stand in solidarity with those who have been marginalized, to advocate for justice and equity,

and to be a beacon of hope and healing in a world that is too often marked by disparities and inequities,” shares Dr. Brandon.

Dr. Brandon became involved with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs by participating in the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program-DAT Preparation. She learned about Health Career Opportunity Programs through students from Oakwood University, and as a result, she applied to the 2019 summer program, where she thoroughly enjoyed her experience. Dr. Brandon further includes that the DAT Preparation Program was her best experience. She had only been to Connecticut once before participating in the 2019 program when she was in high school for a brief visit. “[In] hindsight, that program was a pivotal point in my life that directed me to be where I am today. Those six weeks, I learned so much about the UConn School of Dental Medicine and the surrounding area, as well as made friends who became classmates and [are] now graduating”, says Dr. Brandon.

Another experience that Dr. Brandon enjoyed was being a mentor for the Doctors Academy. She and her co-mentors developed fun and important topics relevant to middle and high school students. “As a group, we shared experiences and insights as current dental and medical school students, playing a vital role in fostering a supportive and inclusive learning community. Cheering on all the students to reach their goals; the sky is truly the limit!” Dr. Brandon expresses.

During her time as a dental student, Dr. Brandon also took an active role in the Student National Dental Association/Hispanic Student Dental Association. She sees these student organizations as fostering a community with others of similar backgrounds, combining aspects of culture, dentistry, and outreach.

Dr. Brandon leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: “In moments of doubt or uncertainty, draw strength from your passion for healing and your unwavering commitment to the well-being of others. Remember that setbacks are not failures but opportunities for growth and resilience. Lean on your mentors, colleagues, and loved ones for guidance and support, knowing you are never alone on this journey”.

JOY GULLO, MD, MPH

Physician, Medical Student, Graduate Student, Mentor



Dr. Joy Gullo graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2024 with dual degrees of Doctor of Medicine (MD) and Master of Public Health (MPH).

Dr. Gullo attended Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology in 2018 with a minor in Music.

Dr. Gullo's interest in science began early on through her parents who introduced her to the clinical and laboratory sides through their work in nursing and education. Her path to pursuing a career as a physician started the summer after her junior year in high school. This particular summer, she participated in a program at a medical school, which introduced high school students to different healthcare professions. "I remember being inspired by one of the emergency medicine residents I spoke with of the dynamic nature of medicine and the endless opportunities for growth and education. She inspired me to start shadowing physicians when I returned home, and the rest is history," recounts Dr. Gullo.

Currently, Dr. Gullo is attending a psychiatry residency at the UConn School of Medicine in Farmington, Connecticut. Her interests lie in women's mental health, specifically psychiatric disorders during the perinatal period, and in community psychiatry.

Dr. Gullo was first introduced to the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs by participating in the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program-MCAT Preparation as an undergraduate student in the summer of 2016. "I wanted a structured way to study for the exam, and I had heard great things about Health Career Opportunity Programs. That summer was very memorable and the reason why I applied to UConn for medical school," shares Dr. Gullo. She further mentions enjoying the program's activities, meeting other program participants who may become her classmates in medical school, exploring Connecticut and the UConn Health campus, and meeting the Health Career Opportunity Programs' faculty and staff.

Dr. Gullo's best Health Career Opportunity Programs experience was the 2019 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II-Basic Medical Sciences Program, in which she participated the summer before medical school. "I was able to get a soft introduction to my medical school courses. But more importantly, I was able to make long-lasting connections with people who I admire and who helped me get through medical school", states Dr. Gullo. In medical school, Dr. Gullo also enjoyed her involvement with the UConn chapter of the Student National Medical Association. The engagement with members of the chapter was important, particularly during times of being physically remote. She maintained these connections through book clubs, exercise activities, virtual study sessions, and movie nights.

"I was able to make long-lasting connections with people who I admire and who helped me get through medical school."

Dr. Gullo leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of aspiring health professionals: "a) Remember that your journey is unique, so go at your own pace and avoid comparing yourself to others. b) Nurture your relationship with yourself and the people you are close to outside of medicine".

TYLER JAMES, DMD

Dentist, Dental Student, Mentor



Dr. Tyler James graduated from the UConn School of Dental Medicine in May 2024.

Dr. James attended Saddleback College in Mission Viejo, California, where she earned an Associate of Science degree in Chemistry and an Associate of Arts degree in General Studies in 2018. She then continued her undergraduate studies at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, where she completed a

Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication in 2019.

From early on, Dr. James has had a dedication to “upholding the values of acceptance, cultural sensitivity, and service” instilled by her parents. She feels very fortunate to have spent her years growing up “around the globe,” where later she would embark on her educational journey in the United States at the age of 15. “I have been shaped by four distinct cultures and guided by generous mentors,” shares Dr. James. “High school in California provided transformative experiences, where dedicated teachers unveiled the influence of scientific research, while my employment in the retail industry fueled my interest in mass media,” she shares. With support from her extended family, she found her way to Connecticut to pursue a degree in Communication. Around this time, her aunt introduced her to dentistry through mentorship. “I was struck by her effect on her patients and dedicated time shadowing her and other dentists. Inspired, I made a deliberate effort to recalibrate to a pre-dental track while taking health communication courses. Constant relocation and change taught me adaptability, creativity, and resilience in new environments. Unwavering family support and mentorship guided me to and through dental school”, explains Dr. James.

Dr. James is currently attending an orthodontics residency at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. For the future, she is strongly considering academia or private practice, which stems from her background being involved with the American Dental Education Association while in dental school. She also wants to enhance her skills in private practice so she can teach.

Dr. James’s first involvement with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs was as a participant in the 2019 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program-DAT Preparation. “I had the opportunity to participate in the DAT preparatory program. It was an amazing experience to see and understand what it takes and what it is like to be a dental student. Walking the halls of UConn Health, taking impressions and casts, and meeting current dental students gave me a deep understanding of the dental profession. I was very fortunate to have that opportunity,” says Dr. James. She continues to state that her closest friends in dental school were involved in the Health Career Opportunity Programs, and it was good to have a sense of community and connection with other students before starting dental school.

During her time as a dental student, Dr. James continued her involvement with Health Career Opportunity Programs. Her participation in the UConn chapter of the Student National Dental Association/Hispanic Student Dental Association, a mentor for the Doctors Academy and Bridge to the Future Science Mentoring Program, and a tutor for the 2021 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II-Basic Medical Sciences Program, have allowed her to make connections through the support of others and receive mentorship from leaders and faculty. Likewise, these experiences have encouraged her to pave the way for others, advising high school students or volunteering in the community. “Growing up in a multicultural environment has granted me a unique perspective and a deep understanding of the diverse needs of patients from various backgrounds. I have always been passionate about mentorship and community service. I have been supported so much by Health Career Opportunity Programs [HCOP], and that has motivated me to ‘pay it forward’ through volunteering with HCOP and participating in the summer tutoring and weekend mentoring programs”, explains Dr. James.

Dr. James leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: “Get a mentor. Everyone who is in the health profession today has had someone who has guided their path. I was fortunate to have many mentors, inside and outside of Health Career Opportunity Programs, to help me achieve my goals and make sure I was on the right track”.

KOLBE LAING, DMD

Dentist, Dental Student, Mentor



Dr. Kolbe Laing graduated from the UConn School of Dental Medicine in May 2024.

Dr. Laing attended the University of Connecticut in Storrs, Connecticut, for his undergraduate education. In 2020, he earned a bachelor’s degree in allied health, for which he applied for a concentration in Health Sciences on the pre-dental track. Dr. Laing also completed a minor in Biology.

Dr. Laing realized that he wanted to pursue a career in dentistry in the sixth grade. This desire to become a dentist stemmed from his feelings that a person’s smile was the “gateway to their personality.” He also found braces very intriguing. Dr. Laing further elaborates, “The human body and science in general interested me more than anything else that I learned about in school. Dentistry seemed to be a mix of independence, financial freedom, manual dexterity, art, and medicine. It seemed to be the perfect profession for me, and I’ve proven to myself that I made a great decision and investment”.

Dr. Laing is currently attending a 1-year general practice residency at Hartford Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. Dr. Laing also plans to continue his research focused on skeletal biology as he wants to conduct research driven by what is seen clinically within patient populations.

Dr. Laing became involved with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs after his induction into the UConn School of Dental Medicine. Through his involvement, he was able to give back to the community and be a mentor to students who also want a career in healthcare or other professional careers through the Doctors Academy and Bridge to the Future Science Mentoring Program. “I was able to participate in the mentoring program for three years and meet and work with many aspiring doctors in 8th grade all the way through their college years”, shares Dr. Laing.

Dr. Laing has also enjoyed the networking events and functions hosted by Dr. Marja Hurley and the staff of the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs with coordination by Ms. Jan Figueroa. Dr. Laing saw these as opportunities for medical and dental students to come together to meet other health professionals and graduate students with similar goals despite coming from different backgrounds. Other experiences that Dr. Laing has enjoyed are involvement in organizations at UConn and looking for new ways to give back to underrepresented communities in Connecticut. “I have had the opportunity to participate in teaching events and healthcare screenings through the Student National Dental Association/ Hispanic Student Dental Association as Community Service Chair for the chapter, which allowed many children and adults to have their first dental check-up, with hopes that they continue with their oral health goals,” states Dr. Laing.

“Dream as big as you can and never believe that there is something that you can’t achieve because you deserve the world just as you are.”

Dr. Laing leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: “Dream as big as you can and never believe that there is something that you can’t achieve because you deserve the world just as you are. Along my journey to where I am today, many people have told me I wouldn’t be able to accomplish my goals. Despite this, I was able to succeed by keeping a strong and determined mindset. This mentality will allow you to surprise yourself with what you are able to achieve in life.”

ISABELLE MOORE, MD

Physician, Medical Student, Mentor



Dr. Isabelle Moore graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2024.

Dr. Moore attended Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, for her undergraduate studies. In 2020, she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Biology with a minor in Child Development.

Dr. Moore knew early on in high school that she loved science and learning about human physiology. Also, she always found and gravitated towards experiences working around children. However, it was not until her junior year of college, when she shadowed developmental-behavioral pediatricians and neonatologists, that she really saw herself in the field of pediatrics. Through these experiences, Dr. Moore saw how teamwork plays a role in healthcare and the various roles physicians can take on, which motivated her toward this field.

Currently, Dr. Moore is attending a categorical pediatrics residency at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania. With her interest in critical care, she plans to do a critical care fellowship in the pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) or neonatology.

Dr. Moore initially learned about the Health Career Opportunity Programs department and its initiatives during her interview day at UConn School of Medicine. When she matriculated to medical school, she learned more through online communication about being a mentor for the Doctors Academy programs. As a mentor for the Doctors Academy, she saw her students through the Jumpstart 10 program as high school sophomores to graduating 12th graders in the Senior Doctors Academy. Dr. Moore recounts with excitement seeing one of her Senior Doctors Academy mentees in the spring of 2023, right before he graduated from high school and getting accepted to the dual degree Bachelor/MD program at UConn (“He will be a great future cardiologist!”, she shares). Dr. Moore further

states, “It was great to work with students from the community with different backgrounds and to talk about your various experiences as mentors. Their weekly dedication to the program at a young age and their enthusiasm for a career in healthcare was also inspiring for me to see”.

In addition to the Doctors Academy, Dr. Moore expresses that it was also great to get scholar-athletes from the medical and dental classes for the 2021 to 2023 Bridge to the Future Science Mentoring Conferences to speak to high school and college students on how to balance college and sports and still aspire to go into health careers. “It was a pleasure to organize and be a panelist for the subsequent Bridge to the Future Science Mentoring Conferences,” says Dr. Moore.

“It was great to work with students from the community with different backgrounds and to talk about your various experiences as mentors.”

Dr. Moore leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: “Don’t be afraid to ask for help and to help others! Sometimes, especially in medicine, you will feel like you do not belong, and I would love to be there to remind you that you do!”

MARIA ELENA NAVEDO, MD

Physician, Medical Student, Mentor



Dr. Maria Elena Navedo graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2024.

Dr. Navedo attended Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, where she was also a member of the Honors College. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music, with a concentration in jazz saxophone, and a Bachelor of

Arts in Spanish through the Teacher's College, with a teaching minor in Biology.

At the age of 25, Dr. Navedo decided she wanted to pursue a career in medicine, which she states was a “multifactorial decision.” Before wanting to become a physician, Dr. Navedo worked as a high school teacher during the weekdays, played gigs with a professional wedding band on the weekends, as well as taught private saxophone and clarinet lessons in the metro-Detroit area. She loved teaching, but her personal experiences with a family member, a close friend, and a student made her want to better support them through their illness and injury. “Additionally, before I was a teacher, I had also had a brief job as a secretary for a complementary medicine chiropractor, which I found incredibly fascinating from an anatomy perspective and mentally stimulating”, adds Dr. Navedo.

Currently, Dr. Navedo is attending an internal medicine-primary care residency at UMass Chan Medical School in Worcester, Massachusetts. She expressed excitement for this next chapter in her career. For the future, she is interested in a career in academia and palliative care as a subspecialty.

Dr. Navedo became involved with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs by participating in the 2019 Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II-Basic Medical Sciences Program. “I am so thankful for the opportunity to see what medical school would be like, learn from members of the faculty, and meet fellow students that would go on to become some of my best friends”, shares Dr. Navedo.

Dr. Navedo’s best Health Career Opportunity Programs experience was participating as a mentor for the Doctors Academy, where she worked with a class starting in the Great Explorations program through the Junior Doctors Academy. “I love teaching, learning, and mentoring, and as medical school was starting, I was worried that I would have to give up working with young folks. I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to work weekly with the group of students I was assigned to and to see them grow over the following 4 years. The pandemic required us to move to an online format which was a challenge, but I am so grateful to Health Career Opportunity Programs for quickly transitioning, that the students were able to have the consistency of continued weekly mentoring through the remote experience”, she explains.

Additionally, Dr. Navedo enjoyed her participation in the UConn chapter of the Latino Medical Student Association, which allowed her to be a part of a wider community and to connect with like-minded students and professionals. As a newer student organization, she appreciated the support of Health Career Opportunity Programs and seeing the chapter grow to include activities such as the Dine and Social event, conference participation, medical Spanish workshops, and volunteering in the community.

Dr. Navedo leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested in the health professions: “Be deliberate in creating and maintaining [your] support system that includes 4 groups”:

- First, find fellow students in the same stage as you - studying for the same tests / applying for the same scholarships.
- Second, find one or two mentors who have walked the path you hope to walk and achieved the things you hope to achieve. They will be your inspiration and comfort when the path seems unclear or you encounter an unexpected challenge.
- Third, find and keep in contact with people [who give unwavering support]; regardless of whether they know about the health professions, they will be there to pick you up when you have a setback.
- Fourth, find a way to give back to the community and mentor the next generation, whether tutoring at your high school or college, volunteering at your place of worship, etc. It’s important for continuing the mentoring cycle and can serve as a reminder of just how far you have come and why you are pursuing the health professions.

JASMIN WILLIAMS, MD

Physician, Medical Student, Mentor



Dr. Jasmin Williams graduated from the UConn School of Medicine in May 2024.

Dr. Williams graduated cum laude from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Neuroscience and a concentration in Molecular & Cellular Biology.

When she was 5 years old, Dr. Williams received a toy

medical kit as a gift and enjoyed pretending to be a doctor when she played with it. She has envisioned being a physician for a long time, putting herself in positions to pursue this career. In high school, she volunteered at Norwalk Hospital in the post-anesthesia care unit (PACU) department. This clinical experience led her to want to be on the premedical track in college. While in medical school, her passion for neurology “grew exponentially,” which was “fueled by both academic pursuits and personal experiences.” Dr. Williams shares, “Witnessing the impact of neurological care, especially in underserved populations, further solidified my belief that becoming a neurologist is not just a profession, but a calling”.

Dr. Williams is attending an internal medicine neurology residency at Yale New Haven Hospital in New Haven, Connecticut. After residency, Dr. Williams plans to do a Stroke fellowship. She is exploring options of academia or private practice but sees herself practicing in the state of Connecticut.

Before medical school, Dr. Williams became involved with the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs through her participation in the 2015 Summer Research Fellowship Program as a rising college junior. During this summer, she conducted biomedical science research in the laboratory of Dr. Annabelle Rodriguez-Oquendo and was also introduced to the other Health Career Opportunity Programs’ initiatives that she could participate in. In the summer of 2017, she participated in the Medical/Dental

Preparatory Program-MCAT Preparation, and later in the summer of 2020, she participated in the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II-Basic Medical Sciences Program before starting her first year of medical school.

Dr. Williams’s best Health Career Opportunity Programs experience was participating in the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program Track II-Basic Medical Sciences Program (BMS). “The BMS [program] for incoming medical students was my best Health Career Opportunity Programs experience as I had the opportunity to meet my future classmates with whom I would share so many challenges and triumphs. It helped me feel confident in the material I would be learning during the academic year”, shares Dr. Williams.

Additionally, as a UConn medical student, Dr. Williams participated in the Student National Medical Association (SNMA). For the UConn School of Medicine’s SNMA chapter, she was elected as Social Media Liaison in 2020 and later as Co-President with Abeid Anslip

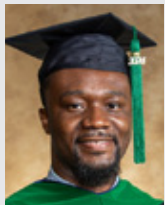
“Witnessing the impact of neurological care, especially in underserved populations, further solidified my belief that becoming a neurologist is not just a profession, but a calling.”

in 2021-2022. She also took on regional leadership as the SNMA Region VII Social Media Liaison in 2021-2022. Through her positions in SNMA, she coordinated meetings and events, was responsible for the UConn chapter’s communication, and represented the UConn chapter and Region VII at national meetings and conferences. Dr. Williams further states, “SNMA continues to motivate me to eradicate practices in the field of medicine that compromise the goal of providing quality education to minority students”.

Dr. Williams leaves the following words of advice and encouragement to the younger generation of students interested

2024 BRIDGE MENTORING AWARD

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs recognized four dental students and three medical students for their continued participation and involvement in the Aetna HPPI Programs with the Bridge Mentoring Award. The 2024 recipients were: Jeffrey Boakye Asabere, MD, ophthalmology residency, University of Rochester Flaum Eye Institute, Rochester, NY; Ashley Brandon, DMD, general practice residency, St. Francis Hospital, Hartford, CT; Tyler James, DMD, orthodontics residency, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL; Kolbe Laing, DMD, general practice residency, Hartford Hospital, Hartford CT; Isabelle Moore, MD, pediatrics residency, Childrens Hospital of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA; Maria Elena Navedo, MD, internal medicine-primary care residency, UMass Chan Medical School, Worcester, MA; Barbara Shehata, DMD, general practice residency, Cambridge Health Alliance, Cambridge, MA.



Jeffrey Boakye Asabere, MD



Ashley Brandon, DMD



Tyler James, DMD



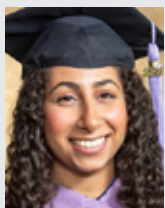
Kolbe Laing, DMD



Isabelle Moore, MD



Maria Elena Navedo, MD



Barbara Shehata, DMD

2024 OUTSTANDING STUDENT AWARD

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs recognized a member of the Class of 2024 for outstanding performance throughout their professional education. The 2024 recipient was Jeffrey Boakye Asabere, MD, ophthalmology residency, University of Rochester Flaum Eye Institute, Rochester, NY.



Jeffrey Boakye Asabere, MD



Dr. Marja Hurley is pleased to recognize Jeffrey Boakye Asabere for Outstanding Service to the mission of the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR MENTORS AND PAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

2024 UConn Medical, Dental, and Graduate School Graduates

Abeid Anslip, MD
Kiana Akhundzadeh, MD
Jeffrey Boakye Asabere, MD
Sergio Acevedo Cortes, DMD
Abigail Boursiquot, MD
Ashley Brandon, DMD
Thomas Caravetta, Jr., MD
Greishka Cordero Baez, MD
Joy Gullo, MD, MPH

Nathalia Hernandez, DMD
Tyler James, DMD
Zorie Jones, MD
Kolbe Laing, DMD
Matthew Lewin, MD
Maleek Masood, MD
Isabelle Moore, MD
Maria Elena Navedo, MD
Obinna Ogbonna, MD

Charissa-Joy Okang, MD
Barbara Shehata, DMD
Kevin Song, DMD
Najah Soudan, MD
Perpetual Taylor, MD
Donyell Williams, MD
Jasmin Williams, MD

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2024 COMMENCEMENT SPEAKERS FOR UCONN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND UCONN SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE!



Student Speaker Spotlight: Perpetual Essence Taylor

Excerpt of article written by Courtney Chandler, UConn Health

Taylor is an MD candidate and the medical school speaker for the 53rd UConn Health Commencement on May 6, 2024

Perpetual Taylor is a fourth year UConn School of Medicine student and a speaker at the 2024 commencement. April 16, 2024 (Tina Encarnacion/UConn Health Photo)



Student Speaker Spotlight: Anthony Perez-Pino

Excerpt of article written by Courtney Chandler, UConn Health

Perez-Pino is a DMD candidate and the dental school speaker for the 53rd UConn Health Commencement on May 6, 2024

Anthony Perez-Pino is a UConn School of Dental Medicine student, DMD candidate, and a speaker at the 2024 Commencement. April 2, 2024 (Tina Encarnacion/UConn Health)

STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS 2024 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 2024 for their exemplary service. The LMSA recipient was Maria Elena Navedo, MD, internal medicine-primary care residency, UMass Chan Medical School, Worcester, MA. The SNMA recipient was Jasmin Williams, MD, internal medicine-neurology residency, Yale New Haven Hospital, New Haven, CT. The SNDA/HSDA recipients were Tyler James, DMD, orthodontics residency, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, and Barbara Shehata, DMD, general practice residency, Cambridge Health Alliance, Cambridge, MA.



LMSA Award presented by dental student and Chapter Co-Social Chair and Past Co-President, Luis Romero to Maria Elena Navedo, MD



SNMA Award presented by medical student and Chapter Co-President, Olasubomi Ajayi to Jasmin Williams, MD



SNDA/HSDA Award presented by dental student and Chapter Co-President, Princess Stark to Tyler James, DMD and Barbara Shehata, DMD



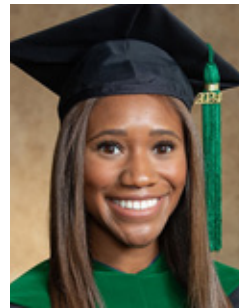
Tyler James, DMD



Maria Elena Navedo, MD

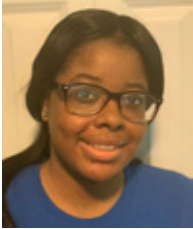


Barbara Shehata, DMD



Jasmin Williams, MD

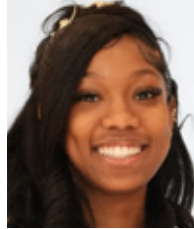
SENIOR DOCTORS ACADEMY GRADUATING CLASS OF 2024



Audrey Addy
University of Connecticut



Jesus Caballero
University of Hartford



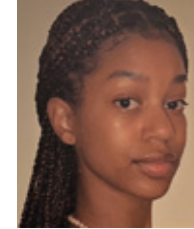
Markeda Carnegie
Nova Southeastern University



Chelsea Coleman
University of Connecticut



Jose Cruz-Gomez
Central Connecticut State University



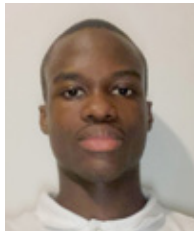
Lauryn Hall
New York University



Mia Khan
University of Connecticut



J'Len King
Eastern Connecticut State University



Seiwa Lukelwa
CT State Community College



Nathan Morgan
Emmanuel College



Izabella Rosa-Sanclemente
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute



Valerie Rosa-Sanclemente
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute



Neha Shanavas
University of Connecticut



Michelle Wilson
Trinity College



Senior Doctors Academy Graduating Class of 2024 with Connecticut State Senator Douglas McCrory (left) and Dr. Marja Hurley (center)

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 as Chairman of 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.

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, awarded Neha Shanavas the 2024 John and Valerie Rowe Scholarship.



Connecticut State Senator Douglas McCrory and Dr. Marja Hurley with the 2024 Rowe Scholarship Award Recipient, Neha Shanavas

BOAKE L. PLESSY, PH.D. SCHOLARSHIP



Boake L. Plessy, PhD

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 postsecondary level. The Friends of the Department of Health Career Opportunity

Programs – 2024 Boake L. Plessy, Ph.D. Scholarship was awarded to Mia Khan at the Academic Year Closing and Recognition Ceremony. Mia Khan is attending UConn 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.



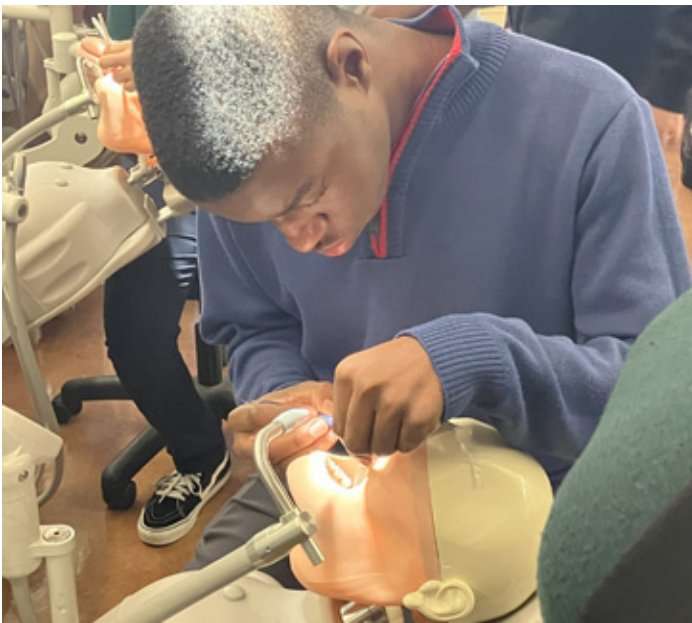
Connecticut State Senator Douglas McCrory and Dr. Marja Hurley with the 2024 Plessy Scholarship Award Recipient, Mia Khan

GREAT EXPLORATIONS

Great Explorations is an enrichment program designed to provide extracurricular activities in math, science, and language arts for sixth to eighth-grade middle school students. A total of 71 students who participated in the Great Explorations Program in the 2023-2024 academic year were enrolled in one of five middle schools: Classical Magnet School, Jumoke Academy Honors SMaRT, Jumoke Academy at the Hartford Conservatory, Renzulli Academy, and West Middle School; or one of two Boys & Girls Clubs of Hartford sites, JDL Northwest Club and South End Club.

Great Explorations also offers a four-week summer academic enrichment program for rising eighth-grade participants and a Saturday Academy for current eighth-graders. The summer activities are conducted at the Learning Corridor in Hartford,

and the Saturday Academy is held at the UConn Health campus. A total of ten students participated in the 2023-2024 academic year component of the program. During the summer of 2024, a total of five students participated in the program. Additionally, the Great Explorations students visited the Connecticut Science Center, toured the dental lab at UConn Health, and met with Dr. Amy Zipf to learn more about careers in nursing during the 2023-2024 academic year. During the summer of 2024, the students visited the New Britain Museum of American Art and the Connecticut Science Center to tour the exhibits and to participate in the Acoustical Science/Electrical Engineering workshop. The students also participated in the heART exhibit to express their understanding of the heart's anatomy through artistic representation.



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 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 healthcare. 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 and academic year programs. 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 PSAT and the SAT exams. A total of 55 high school students participated in the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy program during the 2023-2024 academic year, and 43 students participated in the program during the 2024 summer.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy participated in mentoring activities focused on college preparation, the health professions, relevant health topics, and scientific research hosted by undergraduate students of the UConn Minority Association of Premedical Students, medical and dental students in the UConn Chapters of the Student National Medical Association and Student National Dental Association; UConn Special Program in Medicine students; and UConn Health faculty. 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. Students were further exposed to the health professions at UConn Health through hands-on activities in the Grasso dental lab, participation in the STOP the BLEED program, and engagement in the Inspiring Women in Engineering and Medicine program.



The high school students took enrichment trips during the 2023-2024 academic year to the Connecticut Science Center, UConn School of Pharmacy, the Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine, Central Connecticut State University's Biomolecular Sciences Department, and the University of Hartford's Hursey Center to learn more about STEM fields from professionals, faculty, and graduate students. In the summer of 2024, the Doctors Academy high school students were involved in clinical tours and rotations at UConn Health and visited the Connecticut Science Center and the New Britain Museum of American Art.





PARENTAL SEMINAR SERIES

The Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative’s Parental Seminar Series allows our Doctors Academy students and parents to learn more about important health issues affecting their community and 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 2023-2024 Parental Seminar Series commenced with a college admissions and financial aid panel. The panel included Ms. Raena Beetham, director of admissions marketing and events, Eastern Connecticut State University; Ms. Stacey Downing, director of student financial services, University of Saint Joseph; Mr. Alick Letang, associate director of admissions, Central Connecticut State University; Dr. Molly Minor, director of admissions, University of Saint Joseph; Mr. Nilvio Perez, director of first year admissions, Southern Connecticut State University; Ms. Isabella Pinto, recruitment and outreach specialist, Connecticut State Community College; Ms. Jomaira Rincon, senior admissions officer, University of Connecticut. Additionally, the Parental Seminar Series included presentations on different health topics.



Ireon LeBeauf, PhD, MD

Dr. Ireon LeBeauf, a psychiatry resident at UConn Health, presented on stress and anxiety management.



Kenia Mansilla-Rivera, MD

Another topic of interest was diabetes and healthy eating presented by Dr. Kenia Mansilla-Rivera, an associate professor and Director of the Family Medicine Residency Program at UConn Health.



Victoria Massey, DMD

The seminar series also included a presentation on oral health given by Dr. Victoria Massey, Associate Dental Director, Community Health and Wellness of Greater Torrington, CT, and UConn School of Dental Medicine alumna.

HIGH SCHOOL MINI MEDICAL/DENTAL SCHOOL SEMINAR SERIES

The High School Mini Medical/Dental School Seminar Series offers nine weekly lectures and demonstrations presented by UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine faculty members. The 2024 seminar series, held virtually, included medicine, dental medicine, and biomedical research topics. Ninety-three Connecticut high school juniors and seniors participated in the 2024 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.

2024 High School Mini Medical/Dental School Seminar Series Speakers and Topics



Jenna Bartley, PhD
Aging Research



Elise T. Courtois, PhD
Research Technologies



Liisa Kuhn, PhD
Biomaterials Research



Ian McNeill, MD
Neurosurgery



Hillary Newsome, MD
ENT/Facial Plastic Surgery



Donna Paoletta, DMD
BA/BS-DMD Combined Degree Program



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



Sophia Saeed, DMD, MBA
Patient Care and Health Systems



Hardeep Singh, MD
Orthopaedic Surgery



Belachew Tessema, MD
Otolaryngology



Flavio Uribe, DMD, MDentSc
Orthodontics

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT RESEARCH APPRENTICE PROGRAM

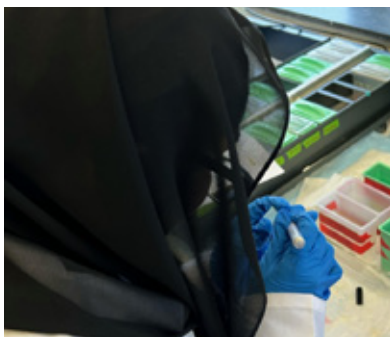
Fifteen students had the opportunity to participate in a research team and learn laboratory techniques in the 2024 High School Student Research Apprentice Program. As part of the 2024 program, seven students commuted daily to Central Connecticut State University, eight students commuted daily to the UConn Health campus, and one student commuted daily to the Jackson

Laboratory for Genomic Medicine for their research projects. Students also engaged in enrichment activities at UConn Health in areas of medicine, dental medicine, and the biomedical sciences through presentations, simulations, and tours. At the end of the summer, the students gave oral and poster presentations of their research results during a special research symposium.

SUMMER SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH BY CONNECTICUT YOUTH AT UCONN HEALTH

By Lauren Woods, UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine

The High School Student Research Apprentice Program is one of the many programs of UConn Health's Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative



UConn Health's Health Career Opportunities Programs (HCOP) summer research program student Maham Chaudhary, 16, working on an experiment in the laboratory of UConn School of Medicine Professor Nilanjana Maulik.

Maham Chaudhary is only 16 but is already learning to conduct innovative research experiments at UConn Health, Connecticut's only public academic medical center with a robust research enterprise. Chaudhary is entering her senior year of high school at Hartford's Sport and Medical Sciences Academy in the Class of 2025. This summer, she participated in the

unique High School Student Research Apprentice Program at UConn Health. The summer research program invites Connecticut's talented high school students to gain exposure to the exciting world of research in their state. It is part of the longstanding Health Career Opportunities Programs (HCOP) led by founding director and associate dean Dr. Marja Hurley. Chaudhary spent the summer in the laboratory of Professor Nilanjana Maulik, Ph.D., FAHA, Department of Surgery, Molecular Cardiology and Angiogenesis Laboratory at UConn School of Medicine.

"Maham is a very enthusiastic, highly articulate, and intelligent student. She is a highly motivated student, also a good writer, and a great speaker. She has consistently demonstrated reliability, personal initiative, and very good management skills as she performed her assigned responsibilities," shares Maulik, who is dedicated to having a new group of HCOP students join her in her research lab each summer. This summer, Chaudhary worked on her

very own research lab project with colleagues and even presented her poster on her research findings about the protein Thioredoxin-1(Trx1), showing that overexpression of Trx1 can increase the survivability of an ischemic skin flap and its mechanism of action after surgery.

"I have never done research before!" she exclaimed. "I was even able to see surgery on a mouse in the laboratory, which was very cool. The exciting translational research findings at UConn Health are leading to real medical advances for patients."

She not only loves research now, but Chaudhary also loves UConn and its people. "UConn is a caring environment where everyone supports each other," Chaudhary shares heartwarmingly. "I love Dr. Maulik. She really believes in us students," says Chaudhary.

Since tenth grade, Chaudhary has been part of the HCOP program and its enrichment programs, helping the youth of Connecticut from all backgrounds and socioeconomic levels have the opportunity to learn more about medicine and science and also the health professions to build a pathway for their careers of becoming doctors, dentists, scientists, or other health professionals to serve Connecticut in the future.

"I am very thankful for HCOP and UConn Health," Chaudhary shares. "We even got to meet the medical school's longtime dean Dr. Bruce Liang." Liang is also a cardiovascular physician-scientist.

What's next for this high school senior? "I will be applying to college and hope to get into UConn and study biology!"

She has a message to the other youth of Connecticut like her who are interested in science and medicine.

"Believe in yourself and your studies. It can be overwhelming but embrace the challenge and follow your dreams," Chaudhary concludes.

PRE-COLLEGE ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

The Pre-College Enrichment Program is a residential enrichment program primarily for incoming 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 before their matriculation to college in the fall. Students participate in the academic track (completion of educational courses) in collaboration with the UConn College of Engineering BRIDGE Program at Storrs or the biomedical research track in a laboratory at UConn Health with the completion of an oral and a poster presentation of the project.

This past summer, five incoming college freshmen participated in the Pre-College Academic Enrichment Program along with four BRIDGE Program participants, and one incoming college freshman participated in the Pre-College Research Program. The students also engaged in numerous enrichment activities at UConn Health, including tours of basic science laboratories with research presentations, professional development seminars, clinical simulations, and tours of the dental laboratories. The Pre-College Academic Enrichment Program participants also engaged in an industry tour in healthcare technology at Medtronic, North Haven, CT.

The Pre-College Academic Enrichment Program participants also engaged with UConn Health medical and dental faculty in a seminar focused on medical and dental specialties. The Medical and Dental Faculty panel moderator 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 faculty panelists included Dr. Gerald Birmingham, clinical assistant professor of general Dentistry and assistant director Health Career Opportunity Programs; Dr. Lenworth Ellis, assistant professor of Medicine, Interim Chief, Division of Occupational & Environmental Medicine; Dr. Camelia Lawrence, assistant professor of Surgery at UConn Health and physician in Breast Disease at Hartford Health Care; Dr. Hardeep Singh, assistant professor of Orthopaedic Surgery; and Dr. Lenora Williams, assistant professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

2024 Pre-College Academic Enrichment Program Faculty Panel “Careers in Medicine and Dental Medicine, Why I Chose My Specialty”



Marja Hurley, MD
Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery



Gerald Birmingham, DMD
General Dentistry



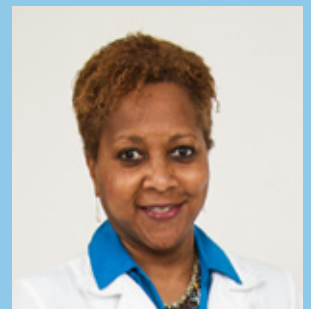
Lenworth Ellis, MD
Occupational & Environmental Medicine



Camelia Lawrence, MD, FACS
Breast Disease and Surgery



Hardeep Singh, MD
Orthopaedic Surgery



Lenora Williams, MD
Obstetrics & Gynecology

HEALTH DISPARITIES CLINICAL SUMMER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The Health Disparities Clinical Summer Research Fellowship Program is an eight-week clinical enrichment experience designed for rising college sophomores, juniors, seniors or recent graduates. In the summer of 2024, seven students participated in the program. The program is designed to provide the following: clinical research and enrichment experiences; an introduction to health disparities across cultures; principles of clinical medicine; public health issues, research, and interventions; an overview of cultural definitions; and discussions of specific techniques for working with diverse populations in community settings. All participants completed a research project and presented a poster with their results at the end of the program. The community sites that participated in the 2024 program were: Family Medicine Center Asylum Hill; Hispanic Health Council; Partnership for Strong Communities; UConn Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities; UConn Extension Urban & Community Forestry Program; UConn School of Pharmacy; and The Greater Hartford Family Advocacy Center, Trinity Health of New England.



SUMMER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The Summer Research Fellowship Program is an eight-week research enrichment experience designed for college sophomores, juniors, seniors, and recent graduates who are interested in a career in medicine, dental medicine, or biomedical research; and for applicants who have completed some college coursework in biology and chemistry (preferably through organic chemistry).

A faculty sponsor is identified for each student. The faculty develops and makes available suitable project descriptions. The student contacts his/her faculty sponsor in April or May and develops a research protocol. Students devote approximately 32 hours per week to a research project and 8 hours per week to clinical experiences. In the summer of 2024, 11 students participated in the program. At the end of the summer, the students gave a poster presentation of their research results during a special research symposium.



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. Medical/Dental Preparatory Program participants prepare for either the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) or the Dental Admission Test (DAT). A total of 21 college students and recent

college graduates participated in test-taking strategies, seminars, workshops, and other enrichment activities during the seven-week summer 2024 program. Additionally, students enrolled in the Medical/Dental Preparatory Program participated in clinical experiences with practicing physicians, dentists, or other health professionals at UConn Health or an affiliated clinic/medical center and participated in clinical tours and presentations.

SUMMER ENRICHMENT COLLEGE PROGRAMS SEMINAR SERIES

Students enrolled in the Summer Enrichment College Programs (Medical/Dental Preparatory Program, Summer Research Fellowship Program, and Health Disparities Clinical Summer Research Fellowship Program) enjoyed a series of seminars on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons and Monday evenings presented by 13 UConn Health faculty, as well as enrolled medical and dental students from June 3 through July 10, 2024. The Summer Seminar Series topics included medical and dental

specialties, professionalism, public health, and basic science and translational research. The participating students appreciated personal anecdotes and reflections by faculty and the enrolled UConn Health students. They could engage in each seminar by communicating directly with faculty and enrolled students, obtaining insight into medicine, dentistry, public health, and biomedical sciences, and finding new mentors.

2024 Medical and Dental Seminar Series Speakers and Topics



Thomas Agresta, MD, MBI
AI in Healthcare



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



Angela Bermúdez-Millán, PhD, MPH
Household Food Insecurity



Gerald Birmingham, DMD
General Dentistry



Stacey Brown, PhD
Cultural Competency



Eliane Dutra, DDS, MSD, PhD
Craniofacial Morphogenesis and Cartilage Function



Lenworth Ellis, MD
Professionalism



Liisa Kuhn, PhD
Medical Devices with Biomaterials Research



Gualberto Ruano, MD, PhD
Personalized Medicine



Sophia Saeed, DMD, MBA
Patient Care and Health Systems



Vanessa Scanlon, PhD
Regenerative Medicine & Skeletal Biology



Flavio Uribe, DMD, MDentSc
Orthodontics



Beiyan Zhou, PhD
Immunology Research for Human Disease

PATHWAYS RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

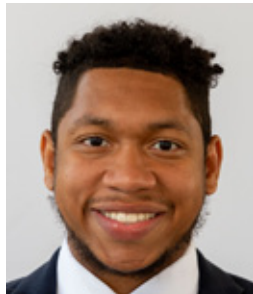
The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs hosted its Pathways Research Symposium in the fall of 2023. The symposium’s purpose is to invite premedical and pre-dental undergraduate students preparing for admission to medical school or dental school to become familiar with the Department’s college pathway programs and to focus on the robust research experiences of UConn medical and dental students. The symposium took place virtually in three sessions on September 28, October 5, and October 12. Additionally, the symposium participants gained tips on interviewing for medical and dental school, resources for navigating medical and dental school, and insight from currently

enrolled UConn medical and dental students. The Pathways Research Symposium series commenced with welcoming remarks and an introduction by Dr. Marja Hurley, UConn Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, professor of Medicine & Orthopaedics, associate dean & director of Health Career Opportunity Programs. The three sessions included clinical or biomedical research presentations given by medical and dental students Eddyson Altidor, Dedrian Barrett, Jeffrey Boakye, Daniella Dennis, Nicole Hardy, Kolbe Laing, Maleek Masood, Alicia Mitchell, and Cesar Rubio Ramos.

Pathways Research Symposium Medical and Dental Student Presenters



Eddyson Altidor
Third-year dental student



Dedrian Barrett
Third-year dental student



Jeffrey Boakye
Fourth-year medical student



Daniella Dennis
Third-year medical student



Nicole Hardy
Second-year medical student



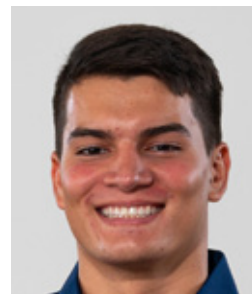
Kolbe Laing
Fourth-year dental student



Maleek Masood
Fourth-year medical student



Alicia Mitchell
Second-year medical student



Cesar Rubio Ramos
Second-year medical student

AETNA HEALTH PROFESSIONS PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE 2023-2024 **ACADEMIC YEAR DOCTORS ACADEMY CLOSING CEREMONY**

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs held its annual Academic Year Closing and Recognition Ceremony for the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative (Aetna HPPI) Doctors Academy on May 15, 2024. 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. Dr. Danielle Watt, associate director of Health Career Opportunity Programs at UConn Health gave the welcome remarks. Greetings were also given to the Aetna HPPI Doctors Academy participants and their parents/guardians by Dr. Marja Hurley, UConn Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor, professor of Medicine and Orthopedic Surgery, associate dean, Health Career Opportunity Programs, founding director, Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative, UConn Health.

The keynote speaker was Senator Douglas McCrory, Connecticut State Senator, 2nd senate district, and Deputy President Pro Tempore, who gave motivating words of encouragement to the Doctors Academy participants. Reflections were given by Neha Shanavas, Senior Doctors Academy Class of 2024, and Dr. Joshua Crittenden, Senior Doctors Academy Class of 2014, University of Connecticut Class of 2018, and Duke University Graduate Class

of 2023. Ms. Carmen Canales-Matthews, 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 the Great Explorations, Jumpstart, and Junior Doctors Academy participants. The recipients of these awards were: Gabriel Anyimadu, Royce Richards, and Ila Troche of Great Explorations; Kieanna Headley and Safa Syed of Jumpstart 9; Olivia Harriott of Jumpstart 10; and Javel Stewart and Kaelyn Williams of the Junior Doctors Academy.

All the Senior Doctors Academy graduates are furthering their education at colleges and universities, with four enrolling at UConn. Neha Shanavas was awarded the John and Valerie Rowe Scholarship Award, and Mia Khan was awarded the Friends of the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs – Boake L. Plessy, Ph.D. Scholarship Award. Additionally, the families of Elissa Matthews and David and Ester Delgado, students participating in the Doctors Academy, were each recognized for their participation in the 2023-2024 Parental Seminar Series.

The Academic Year Closing and Recognition Ceremony also included special recognition of two health professionals for exemplary service and dedication to students in the Health Professions Partnership Initiative: Dr. Brendan Dolan, a general dentist and alumnus of the UConn School of Dental Medicine, and Dr. Ireon LeBeauf, a psychiatry resident at UConn Health.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: SENATOR DOUGLAS MCCRORY



Senator Douglas McCrory

CT State Senator
 2nd Senate District
 Deputy President Pro Tempore
 Chair: Education; Internship
 Vice Chair: Energy & Technology
 Member: Appropriations; Banking;
 Government Administration &
 Elections

For Doug McCrory, giving back has always been a top priority. He was elected with the continued promise

of continued accountability and accessibility as the State Senator for the 2nd Senate District in a special election in February 2017 to represent parts of Bloomfield, Hartford, and Windsor. He was first elected to the General Assembly in 2004 to represent the 7th House district, which he served for six full terms. Even before his service as a legislator, Doug has been committed to strengthening neighborhoods through education, economic development, and civic engagement.

An administrator for the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), Doug has been an educator for over 30 years. Beginning as a teacher at Sarah J. Rawson Elementary School, he has also taught at and served as vice principal at Lewis Fox Middle School. Recognizing the importance of strong role models and education as the keys to positive development, Doug worked with fellow teacher Sadiq Ali to found the Benjamin E. Mays Institute, which emphasizes positive self-esteem through the use of a curriculum infused with African American history and themes.

Doug has also been involved in politics at the grassroots level, serving as a Democratic Town Committee member in the 7th District for many years. Recognizing the importance of participation among people of color in the political process, Doug continuously encourages young people to become engaged civically and to register and vote.

As Senate Chair of the Education Committee, Doug led the approval of a 2019 law creating an African American and Latino studies course available to high school students. Doug continues to champion equity in education through advancing minority teacher recruitment and retention, increased education funding, and supporting youth mental health.



State Sen. Douglas McCrory delivering keynote address at the Academic Year Closing and Recognition Ceremony

Having a quality education may lead to better job employment which may lead to a better quality of life and overall health. Doug fervently works with his colleagues, various government agencies, and small businesses to find ways to improve economic development and is committed to finding and affording access to resources that will encourage and promote the necessary job growth his district and our state need to thrive.

Doug is a Blue Hills resident of Hartford.

'DOCTORS ACADEMY' AT UCONN HEALTH GRADUATES HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

Connecticut High School Seniors graduated on May 15 from the Health Career Opportunity Programs

Neha Shanavas of Bloomfield is only seventeen, but she knows she wants to be a UConn-trained physician committed to serving the underserved.

Her inspiration since middle school has been The Doctors Academy at UConn Health.

“The Health Career Opportunity Programs has served as a beacon of hope, providing access and support to those who are underrepresented in the STEM and healthcare fields,” said Shanavas.

The Doctors Academy is part of the longstanding Health Career Opportunity Programs (HCOP) founded over two decades ago by physician-scientist Dr. Marja Hurley, where middle school and high school students receive in-depth education in the health sciences and career path mentorship on Saturdays and in the summer. The Doctors Academy is one of 14 Health Career Opportunity Programs that are part of the Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative (HPPI).

Shanavas, a soon-to-be graduate of the Sport and Medical Sciences Academy in Hartford, is UConn bound. Excitedly, Shanavas has been accepted into UConn’s Special Program in Medicine to pursue her Bachelor of Science in molecular and cellular biology and a medical degree over the next eight years to become a doctor.

“UConn was always my top choice,” Shanavas exclaims. “The exposure to UConn Health via the HCOP programs really sparked my interest in UConn’s Special Program in Medicine. The team-based learning system and collaborative community also drew me in. I’m extremely grateful for Dr. Hurley and the HCOP team. Without their support, none of this would have been possible.”

Shanavas added, “A lot of students at my school did the HCOP program throughout middle and high school. Since at the time, I was interested in STEM, I decided to apply. Years later, I’m very happy that I did, as it was interacting with different health care professionals and doing enrichment trips that made me interested in going into the medical field.”

Her favorite part of the Doctors Academy was the High School Student Research Apprentice Program’s exposure to the research field, “I even got to present a poster on methods of analyzing pain models for osteoarthritis.”



UConn-bound Neha Shanavas, 17, of Bloomfield, graduated from The Doctors Academy on May 15 (Photo by John Atashian).

Impressively, during high school, Shanavas worked with the Governor’s Prevention Partnership to help advocate for substance use prevention among youth.

“I really realized how important a healthcare worker’s role is in advocating for our patients and their best interests. I hope to stay involved in doing research and advocacy during my tenure at UConn. Having grown up in a city with avid health disparities, I hope to become a physician who is committed to serving underserved communities,”

stresses Shanavas who has a strong message to the youth of Connecticut.

“Take every opportunity you can find out there. If you know you want something, don’t wait around – go out there, explore, network, and get yourself involved in programs that could help you achieve your goals,” says Shanavas.

Shanavas and the 14 Senior Doctors Academy graduates in the Class of 2024 are following in the footsteps of hundreds of successful HCOP graduates like Joshua Crittenden, Ph.D.

This Doctors Academy alum, originally from Windsor, Conn., spoke virtually to the students at the closing ceremony about how he is now working for New York State as an Environmental Scientist. He is a 2014 graduate of CREC Metropolitan Learning Center High School in Bloomfield. He earned his environmental engineering degree from UConn in 2018, a Duke University master’s degree in 2022, and a Ph.D. in environmental engineering in 2023.

“I’m grateful for the HCOP Programs,” shares Crittenden, who fondly remembers starting HCOP in 2009 and spending his middle school and high school summers and Saturdays at UConn Health before attending UConn Storrs as an undergraduate.

“All HCOP Programs are honestly an opportunity to really build foundational skills that I continue to use as a scientist to this day,” says Crittenden. “I first did research one summer in a lab at UConn

Health. I got to present my research findings at the end of the summer. That experience was key to my becoming a scientist. As a Ph.D. I always have to present at conferences. It is definitely a skill I learned in high school thanks to the Doctors Academy.”

Also, research trips to conferences to hear from many health science professionals in the field and connect with mentors are also standout HCOP experiences for Crittenden.

“Ten years later, I still stay in contact and foster relationships with my fellow HCOP students,” says Crittenden. “We all have done successful things in our careers. It’s nice to see everyone live out their childhood dreams.”

He stresses to Connecticut’s youth, “If you are trying to be a doctor or dentist, a program like HCOP will help you become a more competitive candidate and learn the skills you really need. We have to recognize the impact of programs like HCOP and its Doctors Academy, the resource of UConn Health, and the programs’ funding support.”

Brendan Dolan, DMD, a graduate of UConn School of Dental Medicine, heartwarmingly recalls mentoring Crittenden ten years ago. HCOP leadership awarded Dolan a Community Service award for his dedication and work with the students as both an instructor and mentor.



Dr. Brendan Dolan accepts his community service award from State Sen. Douglas McCrory and Dr. Marja Hurley (Photo by John Atashian).

“This program really works,” Dolan shared at the HCOP closing ceremony. “Follow your dreams, follow your hearts!”

UConn Health Psychiatry Resident Physician Dr. Ireon LeBeauf was also honored at the event for her dedicated annual seminar



Psychiatry Resident Physician Dr. Ireon LeBeauf accepts her award from Dr. Hurley and State Sen. McCrory for her support of parents (Photo by John Atashian).

series on stress management for the parents of the students in the Doctors Academy.

“For State Senator Douglas McCrory, giving back is a priority,” said Hurley while introducing the state representative of the Towns of Bloomfield, Hartford, and Windsor, who served as the HCOP graduation’s keynote speaker.

“Thank you, Dr. Hurley, for having a vision!” McCrory applauded. In his keynote address he stressed the critical importance of members of our communities having access to health care, access to culturally competent providers, and always being shown empathy and compassion by more doctors and dentists that actually look like them.

“This program works! It develops health professionals. Young people – stick with it! Young people – we are counting on you! Show your love and compassion. And come back and serve your community,” McCrory said.

Hurley concluded the beautiful ceremony with a special thank you to parents and congratulations to the graduating students.

“A special thank you to the parents who get the students up on Saturdays to get to the program. I’m really excited for the Senior high school students who persisted and are now entering college,” Hurley happily shared.

Congratulations to the 2023-2024 graduates of the Great Explorations, Jumpstart, and Junior & Senior Doctors Academy!

Medical Alumna Speaker



Faith Danielle Crittenden, MD, MPH, is a pediatric endocrinology fellow at Yale New Haven Children’s Hospital. A Connecticut native, she completed her undergraduate degree in Chemistry at the University of Connecticut with a minor in Molecular Cell Biology, graduating with honors in 2014. Dr. Crittenden earned her Master’s in Public Health, concentrating on Health

Policy and Management, from Yale School of Public Health in 2020. She received her MD from the University of Connecticut School of Medicine in 2021 and completed her pediatric residency at Yale New Haven Children’s Hospital in 2024. Prior to college and medical school, she participated in our Aetna Health Professions Doctors Academy, Pre-College Academic Enrichment Program the summer of 2010, College Enrichment Program the summer of 2011, Medical/Dental-MCAT Preparatory Program the summer of 2012, and the Health Disparities Clinical Summer Research Fellowship Program the summer of 2013.

A passionate advocate, Dr. Crittenden has co-authored numerous American Medical Association and American Academy of Pediatrics

policies, such as recognizing racism as a public health issue, combating national hair discrimination in medical professionalism, and addressing structural racism in police brutality, and national anti-lynching legislation as a public health initiative. These policies have significantly influenced national perspectives on race, health disparities, and health equity. Her advocacy extends to public speaking, including a TEDx talk on racism in medicine, and she has been featured in the award-winning short film documentary “The Disparity”.

In 2022, Dr. Crittenden was named one of the 40 Under 40 Leaders in Health Equity by the National Minority Quality Forum. In 2023, she became a fellow of The Op-Ed Project with the National Black Child Development Institute and has had her writings featured in prominent publications such as the Hartford Courant, Health Affairs, Pediatrics, MedPage Today, Ms. Magazine, Yale Daily News, and ABC News. Dr. Crittenden aspires to become the nation’s leading pediatric obesity expert and child policy advocate.

Outside of her professional endeavors, she is a devoted mother to her four-month-old son, Uriel. She enjoys spending time with family and friends and resides between Vernon and West Haven, Connecticut.

Keynote Speaker



Sanford Cloud, Jr., is the Chairman and CEO of The Cloud Company, LLC, a real estate development and business investment firm that focuses on transforming urban neighborhoods and centers. TCC is currently a partner in redeveloping a portion of downtown Meriden with mixed-income housing, Westbrook Village in Hartford with mixed-income housing and a retail/

commercial center, and a mixed-income housing development in downtown Torrington.

Sandy served as President and CEO of The National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) from 1994 to 2004, a human relations organization dedicated to fighting bias, bigotry, and racism in America and promoting understanding among all races, religions, and cultures. As President and CEO, Sandy advanced the

organization’s mission by increasing its visibility in relevant national discussions. The results of his work included convening leading thinkers with opposing perspectives in nationally telecast discussions known as The National Conversation on Race, Ethnicity, and Culture. At the request of President Clinton, Sandy, and the NCCJ worked with numerous faith leaders committed to combatting racism in America; the group’s lasting achievement was a documented interfaith proclamation of “Racism as a Sin.”

Before serving at NCCJ in 1975, Sandy became the first African American partner in a major Connecticut law firm, Robinson & Cole, located in Hartford.

Through much of the 1980s and early 1990s, Sandy worked for Aetna Inc. as Vice President of Corporate Public Involvement and Executive Director of the Aetna Foundation. He directed Aetna’s social investments as the Vice President of Corporate Public Involvement and Executive Director of the Aetna Foundation. He

led the corporation's efforts in ending industry-wide mortgage and insurance redlining in urban neighborhoods across the country, leading its Neighborhood Investment Program. As a senior lawyer at Aetna, he led the creation of a partnership between Aetna and the American Bar Association's Commission on Minorities to develop the Minority Outside Counsel Program, which provided opportunities for African American, Latino, and Asian-owned law firms to do business with corporate America. During this time, he also developed a major financial, faculty exchange, and student internship program with Howard University School of Law.

Sandy recently retired from the Board of Trustees of EverSource Energy after 20 years of service and was its Lead Trustee for eight years until his retirement in May 2020. He also served on The Phoenix Insurance Company, Tenet Healthcare, Avest, Inc., and Society for Savings Bank boards. He currently serves on the board of The Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, The University of Connecticut Health Center and is Chairman of its Board and sits on the University's Board of Trustees and the Metro Hartford Alliance Board. He served on the board of The Connecticut Health Foundation for many years and was Chairman of the Board from 2010-2016.

Sandy has served in Board leadership positions in a number of philanthropic organizations, including the Independent Sector, a national coalition of foundations, corporations, and voluntary organizations; the Council on Foundations; and was Chairman of the Board of Hartford Seminary, now known as Hartford International University for Religion and Peace. He was a member of the American Bar Association's Commission on Minorities and has served as an advisor to the Kellogg Foundation National Fellowship Program. In the early seventies, Sandy was a member of the Greater Hartford Urban League board and Chair of its Government Affairs Committee.

During his two terms as Connecticut State Senator from 1977 to 1980, Sandy's accomplishments included primary sponsorship of legislation creating the State's first Department of Housing, serving as Chair of the Planning and Development Committee, and serving

as a member of the Appropriations and Judiciary Committees.

Sandy is a Hartford native, a graduate of Howard University's College of Liberal Arts and the Howard University Law School (cum laude), and a Howard University Charter Day Award recipient. In April 2019, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Howard Law School during the 150th Anniversary celebration of the law school.

He holds an M.A. in Religious Studies from Hartford Seminary and numerous honorary degrees, including an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from The University of Connecticut and an Honorary Doctor of Social Science from Providence College, recognizing his vast contributions. Sandy has received many awards, notably The Spirit of Anne Frank Outstanding Citizen Award from the Anne Frank Center USA for confronting anti-Semitism, racism, prejudice and bias-related violence; the Visionary Award from the George W. Crawford Black Bar Association; The Thurgood Marshall Award from Quinnipiac Law School; The Edwin Archer Randolph Diversity Award from the Lawyers Collaborative for Diversity; The William(Bill) Brown Leadership and Community Service Award; the Voices of Women of Color Trailblazers Award; and his family earned the Passing of the Torch Award from the Anti-Defamation League for their service to the community.

Sandy and his wife Diane led the formation of The Amistad Foundation in 1987, which purchased and provided public access to the Randolph Linsly Simpson Collection, an extraordinary collection of 6,000 works of art, artifacts, and archives that documents more than three hundred years of the Black experience in America. The collection is housed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, America's oldest public museum. Sandy continues to serve The Amistad Center for Art & Culture as an Honorary Trustee. He and Diane received The President's Award for service to the Center and the broader community.

Sandy and Diane are the parents of Adam, Christopher, and Robin, all Howard graduates. They are also the proud grandparents of Danielle, Adam, Jr., Sydney, Prescott, Sanford, and Ade.

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 2023 Welcome Reception was held on October 4 at UConn Health for the Class of 2027. 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. The medical and dental Class of 2027 was also invited to a reception on December 3, 2023, at the Pond House Café in West Hartford, where they were able to meet the other classes of medical and dental students, as well as UConn Health alumni, medical residents, and faculty.

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 Newline, compiled and distributed by the department, also keeps students apprised of externships, fellowships, conferences, scholarships, and residency programs they are eligible for. A key component of the department's mission is to foster mentorship of medical and dental students by faculty and alumni of UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine to provide them with further guidance for their professional training.

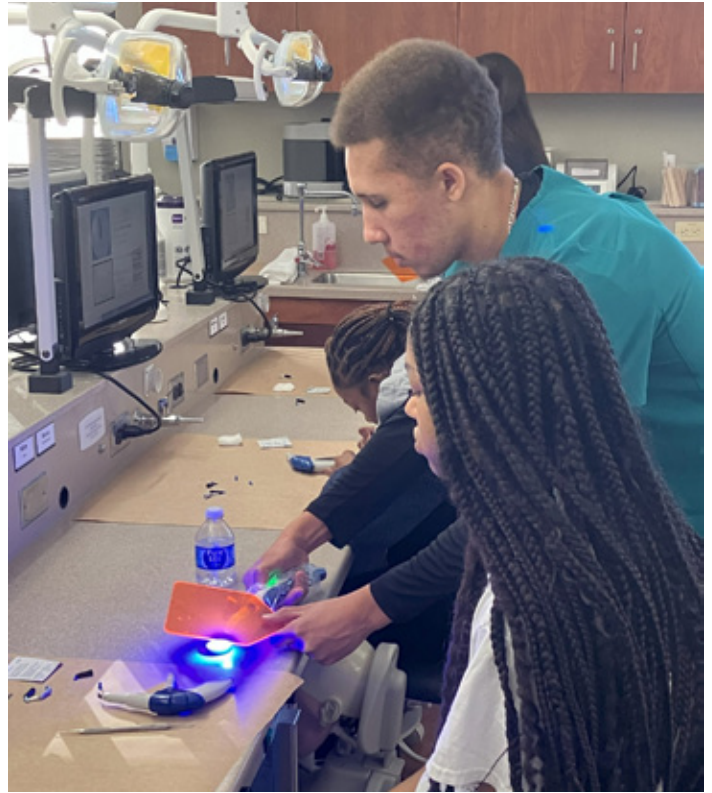
Additionally, the department continues to support the professional and cultural events of SNMA, LMSA, and SNDA/HSDA chapters and encourages student leadership at the university, regional, and national levels. These student organizations remain at the forefront of student life at UConn Health and the greater community. During the 2023-2024 academic year, members of SNMA, LMSA, and SNDA/HSDA participated in networking and profession development events; hosted medical Spanish workshops; volunteered with a local library; hosted educational presentations at the Hispanic Health Council in Hartford on diabetes, hypertension, and preventive care; led panels, workshops, and tours with premedical college students; volunteered at oral



health screenings and schools at various sites in Connecticut; participated in Lunch & Leap, and Lunch & Learn seminars on topics such as imposter syndrome and how to diversify different fields in medicine; led cultural fundraising events for local charities; met with participants of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Hartford to discuss health careers; and organized hands-on health activities for participants of the Saturday Doctors Academy programs.

The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs also celebrates the accomplishments of the UConn Medical and Dental Class of 2024. The 2024 Graduation Celebration was held on April 28 at the Pond House Café in West Hartford. Dr. Marja Hurley and the members of Health Career Opportunity Programs wish the graduates continued success 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.





LATINO MEDICAL STUDENT ASSOCIATION—UCONN HEALTH CHAPTER DINE & SOCIAL EVENT

The Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA) hosts *Dine and Social*, an event to bring together medical students and medical professionals for an evening of food, networking, raffles, and more. The 2024 event, sponsored by the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs, took place on March 21st at the Elbow Room in West Hartford, CT. The evening's events welcomed all students, trainees, and attendings dedicated to the Latinx population. The *Dine and Social* event was designed to provide an informal networking and mentoring opportunity for attendings, residents, and students.

“The purpose of UConn LMSA is to address the health needs of the Latino community, as well as to promote the interests and support of those students who identify themselves as Latino students of the University of Connecticut School of Medicine through social, cultural, educational, political, and other activities.” LMSA is a national organization whose mission is to “unite and empower current and future physicians through service, mentorship, and education to advocate for the improved health of the Hispanic & Latina/o/x community in the United States”.



STUDENT NATIONAL DENTAL ASSOCIATION/ HISPANIC STUDENT DENTAL ASSOCIATION-UCONN HEALTH CHAPTER HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH EVENTS

The UConn Chapters of the Student National Dental Association/ Hispanic Student Dental Association (SNDA/HSDA) and the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs celebrate Hispanic heritage and traditions through various activities and programs, including annual events for Hispanic Heritage Month. The events are a way to show appreciation for the Hispanic culture of the UConn Health community through food, song, dance, and other artistic presentations.

Last year's events by UConn SNDA/HSDA took place on September 25, 2023, and October 13, 2023. The first event included an

Empanada Sale, which is one of the organization's most popular fundraisers for Hispanic Heritage Month. “An empanada is a type of baked or fried turnover consisting of pastry and filling, common in Spanish, other southern European, Latin America, and Iberian-influenced cultures worldwide.” The chefs for this event were dental students Ekene Nnadika, Stephen Ogarekpe, Anthony Perez-Pino, Luis Romero, Richard Cadena, and Eddyson Altidor. The second event was *Salsa Night*, which allowed students to learn the dance of Salsa. The dance instruction was led by dental students Nathalia Hernandez and Barbara Shehata.

STUDENT NATIONAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION—UConn HEALTH CHAPTER **CULTURE SHOCK EVENT**

Each year the UConn Chapter of the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) hosts *Culture Shock*, a school-wide event sponsored by the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs. The event’s purpose is to celebrate the cultural diversity of the UConn Health community through performances, fashion, music, dance, poetry, and other artistic presentations by bringing medical and dental students and faculty together. Participants enjoy a wide array of local and international cuisine through generous donations from many restaurants. This past year, *Culture Shock* was held on December 8, 2023, in UConn Health’s Keller Auditorium. Proceeds from the event were donated to ConnectiKids Inc. and continue to benefit the mission and efforts of UConn 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.” ConnectiKids Inc. is a nonprofit positive youth development organization focusing on “educating, enriching, and empowering Hartford’s youth.”



BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS OF HARTFORD ENRICHMENT VISIT AT UCONN HEALTH

On March 7, 2024, Dr. Marja Hurley and the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs hosted the Boys and Girls Clubs of Hartford Teens Club members for an afternoon of enrichment focused on careers in medicine. The Boys and Girls Clubs members toured the School of Medicine's Clinical Simulation Center with Mr. Alex Hoeger, the simulation technician who is also a Boys and Girls Clubs of New Britain alumnus, to observe the immersive simulation training rooms and manikins for hands-on learning. Additionally, medical students and members of the UConn Chapter of the Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA), Cesar Rubio-Ramos and Calvin Park, hosted a dinner student panel to discuss their interest in medicine, their educational paths, and their experiences preparing for and training in medical school.



STUDENT NATIONAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION – UCONN HEALTH CHAPTER HOSTS UCONN MAPS CHAPTER

The Minority Association of Pre-medical Students (MAPS) is the premedical undergraduate and postbaccalaureate section of the Student National Medical Association (SNMA). The UConn MAPS chapter at Storrs aims to increase diversity within the health professions and ultimately eliminate health disparities. The Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs supports the MAPS chapter in providing support, resources, programs, and skills to premedical students so that they are competitive applicants for medical school. The UConn SNMA Chapter and the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs hosted the undergraduate members of the UConn MAPS chapter for an enrichment visit at UConn Health on March 23, 2024. The event commenced with a Meet & Greet session where MAPS members met with the high school participants of the Doctors Academy to discuss their academic journeys as undergraduate students at UConn. MAPS members also met with Dr. Marja Hurley and attended a laboratory tour and tour of UConn Health. During the day, MAPS members had an opportunity to engage in a medical workshop led by SNMA. The day's activities also included mentorship and networking opportunities during lunch where SNMA members spoke about their personal journeys to medical school.



DOCTOR IS 'UConn THROUGH AND THROUGH' AND TAKING CARE OF CONNECTICUT FAMILIES

By Lauren Woods, UConn Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine

For Dr. Gian Grant-McGarvey, a new UConn-trained Family Medicine expert, community is crucial

This summer, Dr. Gian Grant-McGarvey '14 (CAHNR) completed her residency training at UConn Health and is now practicing family medicine in Windsor.

"It's surreal that I am done with my residency training," says Grant-McGarvey.

"I am UConn through and through – and bleed blue," she proudly says.

Grant-McGarvey first entered the world of academic medicine at UConn Health as a high school student enrolling in the Health Career Opportunity Programs (HCOP) led by Dr. Marja Hurley, founder and director of the longstanding pipeline program.

"It all started in my junior year of high school when I saw an HCOP flyer in my guidance counselor's office," she says. "I decided to apply. It really has all worked out!"

"Dr. Hurley breaks down a lot of doors and barriers for us students," says Grant-McGarvey, who, after successfully completing the HCOP program, attended the University of Connecticut as



In 2011, as a UConn undergrad, Gian Grant-McGarvey presented her poster "The Need for More School-Based Health Centers in Hartford" on the last day of the Clinical Summer Research Fellowship Program at UConn Health. Grant did her research with the Hartford Action Plan. (Chris DeFrancesco/UConn Health Photo).



This July, Dr. Gian Grant-McGarvey celebrated the major milestone of completing her family medicine residency training at UConn School of Medicine (Tina Encarnacion/UConn Health Photo).

an undergraduate studying pathobiology. Then, after a post-baccalaureate year at UConn, I was off to the UConn School of Medicine to become a doctor.

"It was truly great at UConn. I was part of the honors program, but a community service trip to Costa Rica solidified my choice to become a physician after experiencing one to one help of people in need," says Grant-McGarvey.

Born in Brown's Town, Jamaica, Grant-McGarvey came to the Greater Hartford Area at age 5. "I knew at a young age that I wanted to be a doctor," she says.

"My Dad passed away because of lack of health care access where we lived," she recounts. "This is why I want to help the underserved. I want to help people find the care and resources they need. I take his experience to work with me every day, and everywhere I go."

Grant-McGarvey adds, "My Mom had to start all over with me and my brother. Thanks to her, I am now a first-generation college graduate and a doctor."

Grant-McGarvey also credits HCOP for her successful medical career.

"It is awesome to see individuals who look like me grow up to be dentists and doctors at UConn Health. They have made my dream a reality."



UConn, UConn School of Medicine, and UConn Family Medicine Residency graduate Dr. Gian Grant-McGarvey.

She adds, “I am so grateful. HCOP is one of the best programs. Every opportunity I have, I talk about HCOP. Please look it up! They are helping alleviate obstacles for kids of all backgrounds who want to become doctors. I have been guided to do well, climb the ladder, and remember to reach back to help others.”

challenge, says Grant-McGarvey, who is grateful for all her mentors, especially Dr. Kenia Mansilla-Rivera, her family medicine residency program director.

“Family medicine aligned with me as a person, especially its focus on community care and community outreach,” says Grant-McGarvey.

Serving as chief resident for family medicine was a formative experience for Grant-McGarvey. “I could not duplicate that opportunity to be a leader. It really rounded me. It solidified in me that I could do this—and I did.”

Medical school and residency are a big

Grant-McGarvey believes family medicine is a vitally important career. “We treat the family from Mom to delivering her baby to caring for the baby and the whole family. Remember, there is a whole family behind every patient. We treat the family too!”

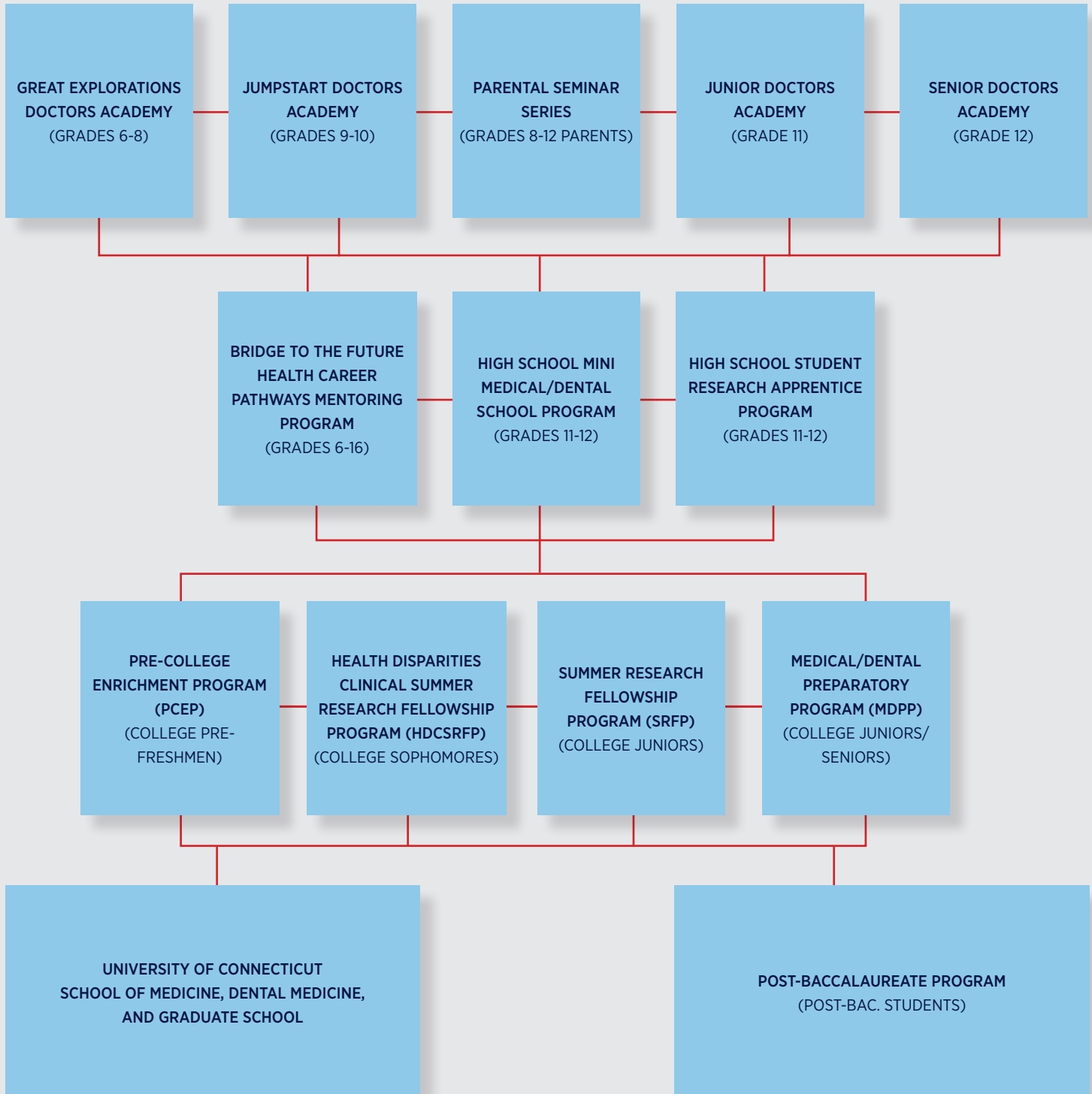
She loves family medicine, as providers focus on the social aspects of patient care, like lifestyle changes and the importance of a healthy diet. To that end, she participated in UConn Health’s new Lifestyle Medicine Track during her residency training. “Family medicine experts share tools and tips that help improve our patients’ health. It’s all about holistic treatment. I love teaching my patients. Health education is the most important component of who we are as family medicine physicians.”

While at UConn School of Medicine, Grant-McGarvey was also proud to have helped the medical school develop its anti-racism curriculum. She says her greatest moment was volunteering at the West Indian Parade with the medical school.

“I am so grateful for UConn and its community outreach,” she says. “I have done a lot while at UConn. It’s now time for me to give back and mentor others. As I move forward as a Family Medicine doctor, I am blending my UConn training with the representing of my West Indian community.”

Grant-McGarvey concludes, “I was raised here in Connecticut. UConn is a big entity in the state. To be a part of UConn and also bring the community together and even closer – makes me very UConn proud! I am a UConn physician through and through.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PIPELINE PROGRAMS,
VISIT US AT: HEALTH.UCONN.EDU/HCOP/



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and commitment to the students

**For more information about the Pipeline Programs, visit us at
health.uconn.edu/hcop/**

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