OUWB Students Gain Experience, Explore Interest as Leaders in National Student Medical Organizations

Oakland University William Beaumont (OUWB) School of Medicine students participate in a wide range of activities to provide them access to experiences and opportunities that strengthen their medical education. For some, like David Eisenbrey, Saritza Mendoza, Verity Ramirez and Paras Vakharia, holding national committee positions allows them to impact issues that they are passionate about.

“It’s an amazing opportunity to continue to explore interests, network, and be inspired along the way. However, it is a commitment; therefore, it should be something which a student has a real interest in participating in,” said Ramirez, student division regional director, American Medical Women’s Association (AMWA).

Being the vice president of the national Dermatology Interest Group Association (DIGA) has solidified Vakharia’s interest in dermatology and has improved his leadership skills as he strives to accomplish the group’s goals to increase national visibility and assist individual DIGAs at medical schools. “Being able to spend my extra-curricular time with DIGA has allowed me to find a forum to channel my energy and interests about dermatology,” Being exposed to the dermatology environment, from working with dermatologists to hospital programs, has only solidified my interest in the field.”

At OUWB, a majority of medical students belong to one or more of the 39 student organizations that have national affiliations. Often times, local involvement is the beginning of a bigger experience for them. Sameer Berry is a charter class member who has expanded his local responsibilities with two student organizations. He is the Chair of the Committee for Economics & Quality in Medicine for the American Medical Association (AMA) and the chair of the Ethics Professional Policy Committee for the American College of Medical Quality (ACMQ). Two more charter class members - Fatima Fahs and Amanda Xi – launched a local chapter of AMWA in 2011 and their involvement escalated from there. Today, Fahs is the student division’s national president elect and Xi is the student division’s current national treasurer.

School Pride Motivates Student Participation

Pride in OUWB is usually one of the main reasons for medical students to pursue a position that is visible on a national level.

“I wanted to use the position as a way to get OUWB's name known,” said Mendoza, the national scholarship fund chairperson for the Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA). She secures funds for scholarships to be awarded to Latino medical students. In her role, she attends monthly board meetings and planning sessions with the organization’s executive board.

Eisenbrey, who spent 15 years in the United States Air Force, prepares for what he calls his next career as a physician by heading up the Medical Student Section Committee on Economics and Quality in Medicine for the American Medical Association (AMA) and overseeing the small working group of the International Federation of Medical Students Risk Management. Eisenbrey explains that physicians forget about the business side of their private practice, therefore, he is concentrating on improving that equation. As an instructor pilot he taught others how to fly jets, now he uses this skill set during group workshops to teach basic finance.

Contributions Result in Rewarding Outcomes

The OUWB students acknowledge that their involvement takes dedication but the benefits outweigh the demands of their roles. In fact, it pleases Mendoza that her efforts will improve the future of health care for Latinos nationwide. And, Ramirez explains that she can see the bigger picture of how she can impact her future patients. “I see other women contributing to larger issues, and it gives me a little extra motivation for my daily routine of studying and spending long hours in the hospital.”

Likewise, the networking and access to the leaders in medicine encourage Eisenbrey to power through his busy schedule. “The benefit of being on the AMA committee is that I have access to the most current information in the field of medicine, and I am working with people who are energized,” said Eisenbrey.

The individuals featured here represent a sample of OUWB students involved in national organizations. While they maintain an intimidating workload, these students often realize that they really do have the strength to manage it all.

“I have learned that I am stronger than I think,” summed up Mendoza.