

OVERCOMING ANXIETY

Student shares story about debilitating disorder.

GLOBAL OUTREACH

Undergraduate students enjoy Ecuador experience.

VOCATIONAL JOY

Alumnus discusses rewarding child psychiatry career.

LINK

KPCOM

Nova Southeastern University Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine





OUTDUELING ANXIETY: THIRD-YEAR STUDENT JESSE SIMON SHARES HIS STORY

Early one morning while he was a premed student, Jesse Simon shadowed an ob-gyn for the first time. Everything seemed to be going well until he and the physician visited the first patient of the day—a young woman who had recently undergone a C-section. A few seconds later, all Simon remembered was the sound of his head hitting the cold tile floor.

Although he quickly regained consciousness, a nasty gash above his left eyebrow required a trip to the emergency room (ER) for a few stitches. “This had never happened to me before,” said Simon, a third-year Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine (KPCOM) student. The ER physician who took Simon’s medical history diagnosed the fainting spell as vasovagal syncope—a sudden drop in heart rate and blood pressure.

“I had no idea what caused the episode. My dad is a pathologist, and he wasn’t sure either,” Simon explained. “He hypothesized that it might be because I was being ‘too empathetic,’ since I had expressed to him how sad I felt after hearing how the patient hadn’t seen her baby since the C-section the day before.”

Fortunately, the next few years passed without incident for Simon, who was able to successfully shadow other physicians and become an emergency medical technician prior to matriculating at the KPCOM. Three years after his first fainting spell, however, Simon experienced a second episode, which occurred while he was sitting at his kitchen table watching a video of an Ultimate Fighting Championship competitor who had suffered a severe orthopedic injury.

With the exception of that curious incident at the kitchen table, Simon’s first two years at the KPCOM were reasonably faint-free. “Because the first two years at the KPCOM are preclinical and did not require me to visit a hospital, it did not interfere with my

education. However, it became a common topic of discussion in my family between my parents and my wife as I approached my third year,” he said.

“Everyone had an opinion about what I should do, ranging from ‘get used to it’ to participating in consistent psychotherapy sessions,” he added. “I opted for a combination of the two. I would try to power through the uncomfortable feelings and integrate some techniques my mom—a psychotherapist—suggested.”

As he began his initial clinical rotation during the start of his third year—internal medicine—Simon’s brain was often overwhelmed with anxious thoughts. “I had a constant, subtle, underlying fear of fainting throughout the entirety of the rotation,” he admitted.

Prior to a fainting event, Simon would experience a presyncopal prodrome that usually began with an increased heart rate and quickly progressed to feeling cold, sweaty, and light-headed. “If I didn’t sit down at this point, my vision would start to blur, I’d hear a ringing in my ears, followed moments later by a transient loss of consciousness,” he explained.

“I was also terrified to see someone die in front of me—an experience everyone in medicine confronts at some point,” he added. “Whenever there was an announcement over the intercom, I would pray it wasn’t a code blue for one of my patients.”

Then came his second rotation—OB-GYN—the ultimate anxiety rematch, which caused heightened stress. “I failed to avoid the pre-syncopal feelings, but I never fully fainted, which was a win. I scrubbed into four C-sections, but I couldn’t stand through a single surgery without having to step back and break the sterile field to sit in a chair and sniff alcohol pads,” he explained.

“Everyone had an opinion about what I should do, ranging from ‘get used to it’ to participating in consistent psychotherapy sessions.”

“What was interesting, however, was that after the presyncopal feelings passed, I was able to exit the operating room and scrub back in to participate in the remainder of the procedure without problems,” he said. “It seemed as if once I got the initial wave out of my system, I could go back in and participate without a hitch.”

Other rotations such as psychiatry, which required no surgical aspects, were a snap for Simon, who experienced no presyncopal symptoms during them. Interestingly, when Simon finally dealt with a code blue during his pediatric emergency medicine rotation, he survived it unscathed. “My family asked how I managed to endure it without fainting, but I didn’t have an answer for them,” he proclaimed.

Simon endured another fainting episode during a standardized patient exam, which proved to be the most embarrassing of the three incidents, as it occurred with two other students in the room. Consequently, as he approached his surgery rotation, his anxiety level reached new heights.

This time, however, Simon took the brave step of discussing his fainting fear with the orthopedic surgeon on the first day



Jesse Simon



of his surgery rotation, who gave Simon permission to fully experience his feelings. “I had discussed my fainting issues with many people leading up to that point, but I think what was unique about my experience with the orthopedic surgeon was that he was essentially coaching me through my symptoms as they were happening to me in the operating room,” he said.

“It could have been akin to some form of exposure therapy,” he speculated. “One of the most frustrating things about my fainting problem was that, intellectually, I knew everything was okay, but I would still faint. It was related to an irrational fear. When it comes to managing anxiety, you can’t beat emotion with reason. Emotionally, I needed to sense it truly was okay, rather than be explained why it was okay,” he surmised.

“While in the operating room with the orthopedic surgeon, once the presyncope feelings passed, I moved in closer to the patient and felt comfortable getting more involved in the case,” he continued. “The surgeon took notice and gradually gave me more responsibility throughout the procedure, starting with holding the retractor and progressing to hammering one of the nails into the patient’s knee.”

After the surgical procedure concluded, Simon experienced a massive confidence boost, both in and out of the hospital. It even led to him

switching his specialty from internal medicine to diagnostic radiology. “I never thought I was cut out for a competitive specialty like diagnostic radiology, so I decided to go with something less competitive, even though I was not thriving in the hospital or in outpatient clinics. Now, I’m excited to pursue a career in diagnostic radiology.”

Simon’s advice to his peers who may be suffering from similar bouts of anxiety is to realize they’re not alone in their struggles.

“There are many students and doctors who have experienced similar levels of anxiety and found ways to cope and accomplish their professional goals,” he stressed. “Try talking with trusted doctors and peers if you feel comfortable doing so. I think you’ll be surprised to learn how common it is.” ■

“There are many students and doctors who have experienced similar levels of anxiety and found ways to cope and accomplish their professional goals.”

SPOTLIGHTS



HANDS-ON SKILLS ON DISPLAY IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Providing students with enriching international medical outreach experiences has been a hallmark of the Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine for nearly 25 years. This year's robust list of international offerings included a trip to the Dominican Republic, which allowed 16 D.O. students to provide care to approximately 700 patients in four communities from February 24 through March 2.

During the outreach excursion, the students, along with two faculty/staff members and one undergraduate student who was accepted into the D.O. program's entering class, visited four communities—Hato Damas, Los Montones, and Bajos de Haina in San Cristobal, as well as Pedro Brand in Santo Domingo.

The experience allowed the students to practice their hands-on clinical skills as they checked patients' blood pressure and glucose levels and performed musculoskeletal assessments. As is the case with most international medical outreach trips, the primary medical ailments identified and treated were high blood pressure, diabetes, and respiratory and skin problems in children and elderly patients.

"My time in the Dominican Republic taught me incredible skills in medicine, as well as the importance of compassion and gratitude," said first-year student Zena Moody. "I am so thankful for the physicians who were patient enough to teach me, my peers who were the best team to work with, and the communities that quickly became like family." ■



SPOTLIGHTS



UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS EMBRACE ECUADOR EXPERIENCE

In December 2023, the Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine's (KPCOM's) Department of Public Health coordinated an educationally enriching medical immersion experience in Ecuador. Unlike typical medical outreach programs, the KPCOM undergraduate programs incorporate domestic and international outreach trips into a 16-week, 3-credit course—a unique curricular innovation.

During the semester, students identified a specific community's public health needs, developed health education materials to deliver during daily health fairs in Ecuador, and engaged with local leaders to create opportunities for sustainable change. The trip consisted of 15 KPCOM undergraduates and three D.O. students, who served as mentors. Faculty preceptors Julio C. Llanga, M.D., M.S., LSSBB, adjunct assistant professor and clinical research coordinator, and Kristi Messer, D.H.Sc., M.P.H., M.S.W., LCSW, assistant dean of bachelor's degree programs and director of the Bachelor of Science in Public Health program, were on hand to guide the students.

To ensure a successful excursion to Ecuador, the college partnered with International Medical Relief—a nonprofit organization dedicated

to providing public health education and medical services to underserved and vulnerable populations across the globe. The participants, who stayed at the local customs police military base, focused their efforts on Ibarra—an underserved area several hours from Quito.

The multifaceted trip allowed the medical team to provide care to approximately 500 patients in local churches during four community-based clinic days, which offered patients medical, dental, mental health, and health education services. KPCOM public health students staffed the Health Education Resource Center and worked in concert with medical residents who were completing their year of service in Ecuador—a requirement to become a physician in the country.

Each day concluded with a debriefing to identify team successes and opportunities for improvement. "Our NSU heroes nightly recognition helped dissipate the exhaustion that often coincides with medical outreach efforts," Messer said. "Without question, NSU students and faculty members contributed significantly to the Ibarra community in Ecuador. We put actions behind the words 'Don't be just another fish in another school. Become a force of nature.' KPCOM students are indeed a 'force of nature.'" ■



Emily Krzykwa with husband Christian Krzykwa and son Crew

PARENTS IN MEDICINE GROUP PROVIDES KEY SUPPORT

When Emily Krzykwa, M.P.H., a third-year student and predoctoral osteopathic principles and practice fellow, gave birth to her first child during her inaugural year of medical school, she had to navigate a number of formidable challenges as she sought to combine being a new mom with the myriad responsibilities of being a medical student.

“It dawned on me that amidst the rigors of medical education, many individuals like myself were either contemplating parenthood or already caring for multiple children. I realized I was not alone,” Krzykwa explained. Recognizing an unmet need, she decided to investigate the possibility of establishing a student interest resource group dedicated to providing support for students with children or those contemplating becoming parents while pursuing their medical education.

Thanks to Krzykwa’s efforts, the Parents in Medicine student interest group was established in the fall of 2023. According to Krzykwa, the organization “is dedicated to fostering a supportive community for parents and parents-to-be within the medical school community,” she said. “Our mission is to provide a safe space where members can access



First-year student Sophia Kershner with wife Juliana and daughter Allesandra

resources, guidance, and support from fellow parents, as well as from the college.”

As the interest group develops, several activities are scheduled to be implemented over the next few months beginning in the 2024–25 school year, such as

- creating a database of local pediatricians, ob-gyns, and day care facilities near the Fort Lauderdale/Davie and Tampa Bay Regional campuses
- coordinating dates for children socials, where parents can meet outside the classroom with their families
- organizing meetings with Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine administration to discuss potential options parents have in preparation for rotations during their third and fourth years
- offering dedicated study rooms to parents, so they can bring their children to campus
- creating a contact list of students who would be willing to babysit and offer child care services within the student population
- scheduling monthly check-ins with mental health coordinators to provide student-parents with a place to discuss the challenges of parenthood and medical school



Second-year student Brookie Hilburn with his wife and children Dakota, Hazel, Norah, and Kaden

“The group serves as a collective voice that advocates for the needs and concerns of medical student-parents within the larger institutional framework within the college,” Krzykwa concluded. “By raising awareness of the challenges faced by student-parents, and advocating for policies and initiatives that support their academic and personal well-being, the group helps create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all members of the medical school community.”



First-year student Kyle Colvin with wife Luciana and children Gabriel and Cecelia

If you are interested in joining the Parents in Medicine group or learning more about the resources offered, please contact Emily Krzykwa at ek619@mynsu.nova.edu to get involved. ■

SPOTLIGHTS



KPCOM GRADUATION PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS

During the commencement ceremony held May 9 in NSU's Rick Case Arena at the Don Taft University Center, 374 proud D.O. graduates marched across the stage to accept their diplomas in front of a genial mix of friends, family members, peers, university administrators, and faculty members. In addition to the D.O. graduates, other newly minted KPCOM alumni were feted at both the May 2 and May 9 ceremonies in programmatic areas such as couple and family therapy, disaster and emergency management, family therapy, health informatics, human nutrition, marriage and family therapy, medical education, nutrition, and public health. ■

MATCH DAY EVENTS ELICIT ENTHUSIASM

On March 15, the Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine (KPCOM) coordinated Match Day events at both the Fort Lauderdale/Davie and Tampa Bay Regional campuses. The air was tinged with excitement as the students waited anxiously with friends and family members to open their envelopes and see if they earned their dream matches.

According to the class of 2024 match statistics, 397 students are scheduled to complete the D.O. program this July and begin their graduate medical education training. In terms of general statistics, 98.5 percent of KPCOM students matched, with 20 matching in the Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program.

From a Florida perspective, 227 graduating students are staying in the Sunshine State to begin their postgraduate training—an increase from the 177 that did so last year. Additionally, 112 matched into internal medicine, 63 matched into emergency medicine, 45 matched into family medicine, 40 matched into pediatrics, 17 matched into surgery, 16 matched into psychiatry, and 11 matched into OB-GYN. ■



SPOTLIGHTS

VOCATIONAL JOY: 1995 ALUMNUS ERIC HEGYBELI DISCUSSES CHILD PSYCHIATRY CAREER

There's a reason what we do daily at our jobs is called work, because it often evokes feelings of drudgery, frustration, and monotony. Fortunately, that's not the case for 1995 alumnus Eric Hegybeli, D.O., FACN, who said joy and passion are the overriding emotions he feels as a child psychiatrist.



Eric Hegybeli, class of 1995

"I get to be in the world of a kid for a while," said Hegybeli, who is in private practice in Avondale, Arizona, where he treats adults and children with mental health, addiction, and chronic pain problems by blending

traditional psychiatry and osteopathic manipulation. "I get to be silly and not take things too seriously for a bit."

Hegybeli credited his osteopathic medicine introduction to his undergraduate premed adviser Duane Thurman, Ph.D., who noticed Hegybeli's interest in natural medicine/alternative care and urged him to consider the osteopathic path. "He said, 'If you want to be a physician, you need to be a D.O., because it offers a better approach to medicine.'"

Because he grew up in Hollywood, Florida, near the former Southeastern College of Osteopathic Medicine (SECOM)—now known as NSU's Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine—Hegybeli had an obvious option for where to apply. "My dad saw an ad in the paper for an open house at SECOM. He took me, and I was hooked on osteopathic medicine after hearing the faculty presentations," he explained.

"I'm inquisitive by nature, and the sleuthing aspect of medicine appealed to me, as did the team/collaborative approach to helping patients," he added. "As for choosing a career in child psychiatry, I've always enjoyed kids and their exuberance, energy, resilience, and inquisitiveness. It's fulfilling to play a role in helping children become successful from a mental, social, and academic standpoint."

His proclivity for psychiatry also stemmed from his preference to spend quality time with his patients. "I like the medical procedures performed in pediatric medicine, but the specialty can be quite intense and somewhat more fast-paced than matches my personality," he admitted. "I like time to ponder medical issues, symptoms, and diagnoses. Child psychiatry usually requires frequent visits where you can develop a trusting relationship with your patients. Fortunately, because I do osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) and provide prolo/regenerative therapy injections, I still get to do some of the hands-on office procedures I love."

Hegybeli, who is a fervent proponent of OMT and the myriad benefits it offers patients, has incorporated OMT into all facets of his practice. "In addition to using it for alleviating somatic pain, I apply it to the care of my psychiatric patients to balance the sympathetic/parasympathetic nervous systems and improve brain function," he explained. "I also use OMT in patients with addiction to alleviate the pain that was the initial reason for the addiction in the first place."

Interestingly, a lesson he learned while attending NSU's osteopathic medicine college still resonates with him today. "Giving my patients the amount of time I do makes my job easier," he stated. "As I was taught in our Clinical Medicine course, if you give your patients an opportunity to talk and you listen, instead of just asking a lot of questions, they will tell you exactly what the diagnosis is." ■



Hegybeli and 1994 KPCOM alumnus Michael Hadley, D.O., at Pikes Peak in Colorado

ALUMNI A

Simone Bruemmer, D.O.

(‘13), joined Bronson Primary Care Partners in Richland, Michigan. Bruemmer, who previously worked at Bronson Family Medicine—Helmer Road, is board-certified in family medicine and completed her family medicine residency at NSU’s Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine.



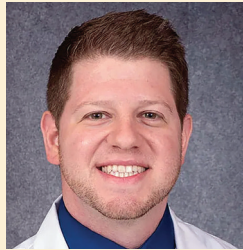
Jeffrey Grove, D.O.,

FACOFP *dist.* (‘90), received the Florida Osteopathic Association’s Stephen R. Winn Friend of the Osteopathic Medicine Award at its live convention held February 16–18 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The award is given to an individual in recognition of, and appreciation for, continuing commitment in promoting the tenets and philosophy of osteopathic medicine in Florida.



Scott Diamond, D.O. (‘18),

who is board-certified in internal medicine, joined Utah Gastroenterology in St. George, Utah. He completed his residency training at the University of Louisville Hospital and his fellowship at Valley Hospital Medical Center in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Sara Iskandar, D.O. (‘18),

joined Baptist Health as a primary care physician in Boca Raton, Florida. Prior to joining Baptist Health, Iskandar served as a primary care physician at Medical Specialists of the Palm Beaches.



Greta Dowling Flaherty,

D.O. (‘10), joined the care team at AdventHealth Medical Group Family and Internal Medicine at Cedartown in Georgia. Additionally, over the past two years, Flaherty has been named Best Family Doctor by the *Rome News-Tribune* annual *Best in Rome* publication.



Marc G. Kaprow, D.O.,

M.H.A., MACOI (‘01), received the Florida Osteopathic Association’s Physician of the Year Award at its live convention held February 16–18 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.



The accolade is presented to an osteopathic physician who has made a significant contribution to the osteopathic community in the past year.

Sarah Goodheart, D.O.

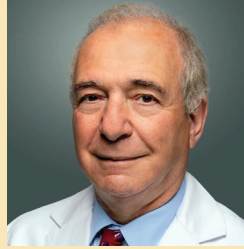
(‘17), who completed her residency training at Jersey Shore University Medical Center in Neptune City, New Jersey, joined Trinity Health Mid-Atlantic Medical Group’s OB-GYN practice located at St. Mary Medical Center in Langhorne, Pennsylvania.



Mary Ellen King, D.O. (‘98), joined Crystal Run Healthcare’s urgent care team in Middletown, New York. She is board-certified in internal medicine/geriatrics and includes chronic illness management, prevention, and well-being among her clinical interests.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Ralph G. Laraiso, D.O. ('87), joined the Prosser Clinic team in Prosser, Washington. He will focus on physical medicine and rehabilitation and specialize in the management and treatment of acute and chronic pain conditions.



Vanessa Osting, D.O., M.P.H., FACR ('04), assistant chief of ambulatory care at the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa, Florida, and chief medical officer at Lakeland's Orthotic Prosthetic Center, was promoted from assistant to associate professor at the University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine in Tampa.



Chirag R. Patel, D.O. ('05), was named senior vice president and chief medical officer at University of Florida Health Jacksonville in Florida. Patel, who joined the hospital in 2019, previously served as assistant chief medical officer. In his new role, he will be responsible for leading the organization's clinical operations strategy and growth. Additionally, he is the first osteopathic physician to serve as the organization's chief medical officer.



Andrew T. Schlussel, D.O., FACS, FASCRS ('08), was elected as incoming president of the Association of Out Surgeons and Allies—a national, multispecialty surgical organization promoting LGBTQ+ inclusion and equality in healthcare. He recently joined the medical staff at HCA Florida Jacksonville Surgical Specialists in Florida.



Daniel Solano, D.O. ('16), was appointed as one of the ophthalmology consultants for the Tampa Bay Rays professional baseball team. In this new role, Solano and other local ophthalmologists will care for the Tampa Bay Rays' major and minor league teams, which consist of more than 150 players.



William H. Stager, D.O., M.S., M.P.H., FAAFP, FAAMA, FAAO, FACOFP *dist.* ('89), was elected 2024–25 president of the American Academy of Osteopathy at its Convocation 2024 event held in March in Colorado Springs, Colorado. This marked the sixth time Stager has been elected president of an osteopathic medical organization.



Nova Southeastern University admits students of any race, color, sex, age, nondisqualifying disability, religion or creed, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, military service, veteran status, or national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school, and does not discriminate in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs. Any such acts are unacceptable and strictly prohibited by the university • Nova Southeastern University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award associate's, baccalaureate, master's, educational specialist, doctoral, and professional degrees. Nova Southeastern University also may offer credentials such as certificates and diplomas at approved degree levels. Questions about the accreditation of Nova Southeastern University may be directed in writing to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097, by calling (404) 679-4500, or by using information available on SACSCOC's website (www.sacscoc.org).

WAYS TO SUPPORT

ESTABLISH A SCHOLARSHIP OR PROGRAMMING ENDOWMENT

With a minimum gift of \$25,000, which can be paid over multiple years, individuals or companies can establish an endowed fund to support the general operations, student scholarships, or research projects or outfit a space/area with the latest technology. Endowed funds can be named for the donor, the donor's family or business, or in memory of a loved one.

SUPPORT GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH AND COMPASSIONATE PATIENT CARE

Individuals, companies, and foundations can support cutting-edge research and treatment for patients suffering from complex neuro-inflammatory illnesses or children with autism struggling with feeding and swallowing disorders. Gifts to support research and clinical care have the potential to impact the lives of patients today and for generations to come.

LEAVE A LEGACY

Leaving a legacy gift is simple and, in most cases, does not impact your current financial situation. We accept gifts of life insurance, retirement assets, and bequests. Our advancement professionals will work with you (and your legal and financial advisers, when appropriate) to create a philanthropic plan customized for you.

All gifts to NSU are tax-deductible and can be customized. You will be provided with a receipt for your records.

Interested in Partnering?

Contact: Kathryn W. Miller, J.D.
kmiller6@nova.edu | (954) 658-2045

KPCOM Alumni Connect

Connect with fellow graduates, **expand** your professional network, employ or offer **mentorship**, and **stay engaged** with your KPCOM community.

SIGN UP TODAY.



kpcomalumniconnect.com

Dr. Kiran C. Patel College
of Osteopathic Medicine
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

NSU
Florida