

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY  
**COM Outlook** SUMMER/FALL 2021

DR. KIRAN C. PATEL COLLEGE OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE



SPECIAL ISSUE  
**MENTAL HEALTH**

# BE THE LEADER YOUR COMMUNITY NEEDS.



NSU's Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine offers various undergraduate and graduate degree and professional certificate programs that produce compassionate and respected health care leaders.

- Doctor of Marriage and Family Therapy (D.M.F.T.)
- Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.)
- Doctor of Philosophy in Couple and Family Therapy (Ph.D.)
- Master of Public Health (M.P.H.)
- Master of Science in
  - Disaster and Emergency Management (M.S.)
  - Couple and Family Therapy (M.S.)
  - Health Informatics (M.S.)
  - Medical Education (M.S.)
  - Nutrition (M.S.)
- Bachelor of Science in
  - Health and Wellness Coaching (B.S.)
  - Health Informatics (B.S.)
  - Human Development and Family Studies (B.S.)
  - Human Nutrition (B.S.)
  - Public Health (B.S.)
- Graduate Certificate in
  - Emergency Medicine
  - Family Studies
  - Functional Nutrition and Herbal Therapy
  - Health Education
  - Health Professions Preparation
  - Medical Informatics
  - Public Health
  - Public Health Informatics
  - Social Medicine
  - Solution-Focused Coaching

For additional information,  
please visit [osteopathic.nova.edu](http://osteopathic.nova.edu).

**NSU** Florida



14



## Features

### 04 Pathways to Reentry

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

### 08 Thriving Together

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH CHAIRS OFFER PEER SUPPORT

### 12 Mental Matters

KPCOM AND NSU FOCUS ON STUDENT WELL-BEING

### 14 Heartaches and Healing

CAN-D.O. SPIRIT HELPS STUDENT SURVIVE STRUGGLES

### 18 REDI for Change

STUDENT INITIATIVE ASSISTS THE UNDERSERVED

38



## Special Section

### 20 MENTAL HEALTH

RAW AND UNRAVELED | COVID-19 AND STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH | GETTING BEYOND GRIEF | THE RAINBOW PATIENT | DEPRESSION DURING LOCKDOWN | IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE? | RUNNING TOWARD MY PROBLEMS | RUNNING FROM ISOLATION | BLOOMING THROUGH THE STORM | PRIORITIZING STUDENT WELLNESS | STRENGTH IN VULNERABILITY | WHEN THE PATIENT BECOMES THE DOCTOR | I AM YOU | THE ART OF HEALING WITH ACRYLICS

40



## Departments

### 02 Editor's Exchange

### 03 HPD COMMUniqué

### 40 Graduation 2021/Senior Awards

### 46 Graduation Profile

KINDRED CONNECTION

### 48 Alumni Spotlight

HEARTFELT CARE

### 52 Alumni News

### 56 Closing Notes

46



SUMMER/FALL 2021 • VOLUME 22, NUMBER 2

**COM Outlook** is produced by  
**NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY**  
 Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine  
 3200 South University Drive  
 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33328-2018

[osteopathic.nova.edu](http://osteopathic.nova.edu)  
[facebook.com/novaosteopathic](https://facebook.com/novaosteopathic)  
[instagram.com/nsukpcom](https://instagram.com/nsukpcom)

**NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY**  
**George L. Hanbury II, Ph.D.**  
 President and Chief Executive Officer

**HEALTH PROFESSIONS DIVISION**  
**Frederick Lippman, R.Ph., Ed.D.**  
 Chancellor, Special Projects

**Irving Rosenbaum, D.P.A., Ed.D., M.P.A.**  
 Vice President for Operations

**DR. KIRAN C. PATEL COLLEGE OF  
 OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE**  
**Elaine M. Wallace, D.O., M.S.<sup>4</sup>**  
 Dean

**EXECUTIVE EDITOR**  
**Scott Colton, B.A., APR**  
 Director of Medical Communications  
 and Special Projects  
 (954) 262-5147 • [scottc@nova.edu](mailto:scottc@nova.edu)

**ART DIRECTOR**  
**Susan Tischenkel-Hayward**  
 Associate Director/Senior Graphic Designer  
 Office of Printing and Publications

**ILLUSTRATIONS**  
**Randy McCafferty**  
 Senior Graphic Designer  
 Office of Printing and Publications

**Richard Kobs**  
 Graphic Designer II  
 Office of Printing and Publications

**OFFICE OF PRINTING AND PUBLICATIONS**  
**Bernadette Bruce**, Executive Director  
**Sheryl Koral**, University Editor  
**Alejandro Hernández Padilla**, Associate Editor/Copywriter  
**Ann-Marie Parish**, Production Manager

Nova Southeastern University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award associate's, baccalaureate, master's, educational specialist, doctorate, and professional degrees. Contact the Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or call 404-679-4500 for questions about the accreditation of Nova Southeastern University.

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.

06-023-ZISAT



*“What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candor, and more unashamed conversation.” —Glenn Close*

The past 18 months have severely tested even the most mentally strong among us due to the emotional toll exacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, continued incidents of racial injustice, and mind-boggling political divisiveness. Add in our individual struggles with life,

love, and finances, and you have an unfettered path to anguish.

The introductory quote from the acclaimed *Fatal Attraction* actress conveys an important sentiment regarding the importance of good mental health, which is why this issue of *COM Outlook* focuses on such a crucial topic. In the article “Pathways to Reentry: The Importance of Self-Care,” Dr. Scott Poland, a nationally renowned professor at Nova Southeastern University’s (NSU’s) College of Psychology, shares a range of self-care strategies to help us maintain our emotional well-being.

The administration at NSU’s Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine (KPCOM) has always been committed to providing its students with various types of emotional assistance, which is exemplified in the piece “Thriving Together: Student Mental Health Chairs Offer Peer Support.” In this revealing article, the KPCOM’s various student mental health chairs share how they responded to the pandemic by providing virtual support and insightful activities to help their peers cope with pandemic-related stressors.

Similarly, the article “Mental Matters: KPCOM and NSU Focus on Student Well-Being” offers an incisive overview of the various resources available to address students’ mental health needs. From a personal standpoint, class of 2025 student Halford Warlick IV shares the mental health hurdles he has dealt with in the compelling piece “Heartaches and Healing: Can-D.O. Spirit Helps Student Survive Struggles.”

In perhaps the magazine’s most poignant section simply titled **MENTAL HEALTH**, a number of students share their stories related to the various types of mental health issues they’ve encountered either personally or in clinical situations. Some discuss how they’ve overcome their emotional struggles, while others detail how they’ve coped with COVID-related stressors.

With headlines ranging from “Depression During Lockdown” and “Getting Beyond Grief” to “Raw and Unraveled” and “Running Toward My Problems,” these first-person perspective pieces provide the reader with a window into the authors’ souls.

This issue of *COM Outlook* accomplishes what Glenn Close expressed in the opening quote about mental health by shining “more sunlight, more candor, and more unashamed conversation” on the topic.

Scott Colton, B.A., APR  
 Director of Medical Communications and Special Projects





I want to extend my sincere thanks to everyone who comprises the Nova Southeastern University (NSU) community for doing such a commendable job of allowing us to maintain a sense of continuity in the way we have provided our Health Professions Division (HPD) students innovative ways to pursue their education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thanks to the NSU administration and faculty and staff members, we have been able to seamlessly provide our students with educational modalities that have allowed them to pursue their academic degrees and professional certifications without interruption. As a result, they will be able to provide quality health care and service to their patients and communities once they graduate.

Keeping the university operational has required a great deal of collaboration, communication, and cooperation between the deans and NSU's executive leadership to provide the students with an enriching educational experience during an unprecedented pandemic.

The result has been a successful mix of BlendFlex, Zoom, and socially distanced on-campus education that has kept the university safe and functional.

I want to give particular credit to our deans and faculty members, who truly understood the responsibilities we all have to provide our student population

with the best educational opportunities possible at all times. The ability to accomplish this difficult task during a prolonged pandemic has required a true team effort that is much appreciated. I am also extremely proud that NSU was able to offer on-campus COVID-19 vaccinations to its student and faculty and staff populations.

The key to our success during these challenging times has been constant collaboration. It reminds me of what Dr. Morton Terry, the founder of the Health Professions Division, used to constantly say about the importance of the various programs in the HPD acting as a unified health care unit that recognize each other's professions as being integral to our professional goals.

Adopting this philosophy allowed the HPD programs to work as a team. Because of this unified approach, the NSU-HPD colleges have become a shining light in the eyes of the academic world in terms of providing high-quality academic and clinical knowledge to their students.

As we look to the immediate future, our greatest desire is a full return to in-person interactions between students and faculty and staff members so we can look at each other, smile—and maybe even shed a tear of joy to see each other face-to-face and not on Zoom. It's taken a collaborative effort from everyone at NSU to get us through a very difficult period of time.

I thank you all.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frederick Lippman".

Frederick Lippman, R.Ph., Ed.D.  
Chancellor, Health Professions Division, Special Projects

**I am also extremely proud that NSU was able to offer on-campus COVID-19 vaccinations to its student and faculty and staff populations.**

# PATHWAYS TO REENTRY

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

BY SCOTT COLTON, B.A., APR





---

**“There’s a misunderstanding that self-care is somehow selfish. It is not. Self-care is basically taking care of yourself so you will be in a better position to support others.”**

—Scott Poland

---

**P**erhaps no timeworn maxim sums up people’s current psychological state better than “If it’s not one thing, it’s another.”

According to a recent report from the American Psychological Association, nearly 50 percent of Americans say they feel anxious about resuming in-person interactions as the United States emerges from its lengthy COVID-19 confinement. As a result, psychologists have dubbed the phenomenon “reentry anxiety.”

This summer, many NSU Sharks returned to their various campuses full time after spending most, if not all, of their time studying and working from home since March 2020. With reentry anxiety running rampant, NSU administrators worked diligently to allay fears about returning to a busy campus and a post-quarantine existence.

To help address these concerns and discuss effective coping tactics, *COM Outlook* reached out to Scott Poland, Ed.D., M.A., a nationally renowned professor at Nova Southeastern University’s (NSU’s) College of Psychology and director of the university’s Suicide and Violence Prevention Office.

### **Competent Coping**

In his role as a nationally certified school psychologist who has participated in numerous webinars regarding reentry issues for K–12 schools, Poland frequently shares with his audiences “the importance of focusing on what is right in front of us and not worrying about things that have not yet happened, which is a hallmark of mindfulness.”

He added that, “Many people have also been helped by the concept of setting up a worry time. What that entails, for example, is telling yourself, ‘Between 7:00 and 7:20 p.m., I will focus on all my worries for myself and my family, but prior to that time, I will focus on things I need to do and how I can be supportive to everyone in my life,’” Poland explained.

### **Self-Care Significance**

“I believe many Americans are suffering from a low-grade form of depression as a result of the pandemic, and that is why self-care plans are important for everyone,” Poland explained. “Self-care means having a plan to help yourself cope. There’s a misunderstanding that self-care is somehow selfish. It is not. Self-care is basically taking care of yourself so you will be in a better position to support others.”

*(continued on page 6)*

According to Poland, self-care involves several key concepts:



Physical self-care includes a healthy diet, exercise, and getting the needed amount of sleep. With the proper amount of rest, we are simply in a much better state of mind to deal with all of the stressors in our lives.



Identify someone who is your go-to person for listening to your concerns.



Identify the self-care activities you previously engaged in and reflect on whether you have been doing these things during the changes in your life caused by the pandemic. It's especially important to recognize and reconnect with support systems you have previously used.



Mental self-care is another key component, which includes attending to your emotional needs by talking to other adults and examining the problems outside of your body. Meditation and relaxation activities are very important in managing stress and letting go of self-criticism, as everyone has made mistakes during the pandemic. It is important to express thoughts and emotions through journaling, painting, drawing, gardening, and other creative avenues.



Spiritual self-care provides for active participation in places of worship and is very helpful to many people. Even those who are not active in a place of worship need to live by a set of values that includes compassion, empathy, friendliness, helpfulness, humor, and respectfulness.



Embrace nature by spending time outdoors.



Model good values by being that positive person for your family and others.

## Suicide Mitigation

In difficult times, it's not surprising to learn that suicide rates increase. According to Poland, "Suicide rates in America were at a 50-year high prior to the pandemic, with significant increased suicides noted in 2018 for middle-aged men, veterans, and adolescents. At the foundation of suicide is untreated or undertreated mental illness, often in combination with an adverse experience, which the pandemic certainly has been," he explained.

"A suicidal individual often feels isolated and experiences what is called a low sense of belongingness," he added. "The pandemic has increased isolation for all Americans, as they have been unable to visit extended family, attend places of worship, and go to the workplace, schools, and community gatherings."

Because the pandemic has led to such a prolonged period of isolation for many, Poland said it is critical for people to understand the warning signs of suicide: statements about death and suicide, giving away prized possessions, making out a will, and dramatic changes in behavior. "We need to be careful not to ignore or dismiss these signs, and need to ask directly if they are thinking of suicide," he emphasized. "We also need to let them know they are not the first people to feel this way, and that help is available." □

## Feeling Overwhelmed?

- **NSU students can contact the NSU Center for Student Counseling and Well-Being at (954) 424-6911.**
- **The NSU Student CARE Team can also be accessed at [nova.edu/studentcare](https://nova.edu/studentcare).**
- **NSU employees can contact the Employee Assistance Program at 877-398-5816.**
- **If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, please call the 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255 or 800-SUICIDE.**
- **The NSU College of Psychology has produced numerous webinars on various aspects of coping with the pandemic, which are available to view at [nova.edu/sharkchats](https://nova.edu/sharkchats).**



# Staying CALM

By Scott Poland, Ed.D., M.A.

In my training webinars, I have been emphasizing what I refer to as the **CALM** model. Each letter in the model stands for an important concept we should keep in mind as we navigate through this unprecedented pandemic.



stands for controlling what we can, which is our reaction to the pandemic and our ability to follow the recommended guidelines. The C also stands for staying calm and realizing that although life has been a struggle for the past year or so, we will get through this.



stands for being alert to when we are experiencing stress and have a need for self-care. It also stands for being available for others when they need support.



stands for listening to others and recognizing that everyone has a story to tell about the pandemic. I try to open every conversation with others by sincerely asking how they are doing. I am there to listen to what they have to say. I have also been using the L to focus on limiting news coverage. Certainly, the news is better now, but early on, it was very difficult to watch the news coverage of the overwhelmed intensive care units and the stories about those who were not even able to say goodbye to their loved ones. In particular, I believe it's important to pay attention to our children and make sure the images they see on television are appropriate for their developmental age level.



stands for modeling coping skills and optimism for our family, our friends, and our coworkers. The M could also stand for managing life in our homes. I spent the bulk of my career focusing on the mental health needs of children. Throughout this pandemic, children have needed the adults in their lives to model coping skills and provide structure and routine in the home.

# THRIVING

# T GETHER

## STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH CHAIRS OFFER PEER SUPPORT

BY SCOTT COLTON, B.A., APR

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the world to retreat from normalcy and to work and study from home, the resourceful Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine (KPCOM) student mental health chairs responded with virtual support and astute activities to help their peers cope with pandemic-related stressors.

The designated student chairs identified and addressed the specific needs of the first- and second-year classes at both the Fort Lauderdale/Davie and Tampa Bay Regional campuses. “I think it is critical to have mental health chairs for our classes, because we provide a voice for students that is different from the usual academic perspective,” said second-year student Nabila Rehman, who is the class of 2023 student mental health chair in Tampa Bay.

“We bring an added aspect focused on tackling mental health issues, which are a highly prevalent problem among medical students. Because of the rigor of our coursework, it often becomes easy to lose focus of the big picture, overwork ourselves, and drive ourselves into a state of burnout,” she added. “Our purpose is to work to prevent students from reaching that state of

burnout, or to help them recover from it if they reach that point. We also act as a point of contact for many students concerned about their mental health, provide them with reassurance as their peers, and direct them to the correct resources when necessary.”

### Creative Solutions

Although the pandemic forced all KPCOM students to adapt to new academic and social norms, the situation was especially stressful for

“Many of them moved here from a different state in the middle of a pandemic, with no ability to meet anyone or make new friends,” Ashkenazi added. “Other students had to stay at home with a family of 10, children included, who all transitioned to working from or going to school from home.”

To assist her peers, Ashkenazi compiled a list of locations where students could study in peace away from their noisy households. “I contacted various places over the

### To assist her peers, Ashkenazi compiled a list of locations where students could study in peace away from their noisy households.

the class of 2024 Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine students, who began their educational journey remotely via Zoom in the summer of 2020 instead of interacting with their peers and faculty members in person. “During the first few weeks of school, when we all ‘first got here,’ it was really difficult for the students to get accustomed to everything,” said first-year student Arielle Ashkenazi, Fort Lauderdale/Davie class of 2024 student mental health chair.

phone to confirm if they had Wi-Fi, if there were seating restrictions, and what COVID protocols the places, such as public libraries, were following before adding them to the list,” she explained.

At the Tampa Bay Regional Campus, first-year student Katrina Seenath, class of 2024 student mental health chair, did her part to serve the needs of her class. “Before starting our Osteopathic Principles and Practice (OPP) course, we held an open discussion for the first-year



students to promote body positivity and ease into our new normal for OPP. I also served as a liaison between my classmates and the administration, particularly for classmates facing hardships,” she explained.

“To ease their burden, I’d find out who their point of contact should be and what steps they should take in their situation, especially if it wasn’t particularly clear in the student handbook. At the end of the fall

Connect, which acted as a safe space for our fellow classmates,” said second-year student Ted Frederic, class of 2023 Fort Lauderdale/Davie student mental health chair. “With the increased isolation we experienced this past year, the summer of 2020 was an opportune time for us to move forward with this initiative.”

While Frederic was busy organizing DOs Connect and other activities, Rehman focused on working with her counterparts at

for the students to enjoy themselves and decompress from the rigors of medical school.”

Activities have included everything from the incorporation of revitalizing yoga sessions and open discussion forums to game nights and interactive presentations on mental health issues. Events were also coordinated to coincide with important dates, such as World Mental Health Day and World Suicide Prevention Day.

“On World Suicide Prevention Day, which is observed every September 10, we hosted a Zoom session where we all gathered to light a candle in memory of a loved one lost to suicide or who struggled with suicidal ideations,” Frederic said. “For Thanksgiving, the Student Government Association and the Mental Health Task Force hosted a Share Your Truth event to promote unity and camaraderie amongst the student body. This event allowed students to anonymously share something they have been struggling with and something they are grateful for.”

To commemorate World Mental Health Day, “We hosted a more lighthearted event to encourage everyone to do something nice for themselves and then create a post on Instagram to share what they’ve done with other students to lift others’ spirits or give people ideas for nice ways to take care of and treat themselves,” Rehman explained.

### **Beyond COVID**

Although many of the virtual activities were established to help students deal with academic life amid an unprecedented pandemic,

## **“The mental health chairs at both campuses worked together to organize monthly events to bring our classes together, both to relax and to discuss heavier topics pertinent to maintaining mental health.”**

**—Nabila Rehman**

semester, when our classmates were faced with remediation for the first time, I worked with the campus’s class of 2024 curriculum chair Joseph Afzali to put together a list of resources to ease the burden on our classmates. With the help of Nabila Rehman, we were able to put our classmates in touch with upperclassmen who could shed light on the remediation experience to make it less daunting.”

### **Thoughtful Programming**

The student mental health chairs worked diligently to create activities and programming that would offer innovative outlets to relieve anxiety and burnout, as well as encourage engagement. One such example was the establishment of the student-led support group DOs Connect.

“One of my main focuses this past year was the creation of DOs

the Fort Lauderdale/Davie and Tampa Bay Regional campuses to organize events over Zoom for the first- and second-year classes.

“Because of the pandemic, we have not been able to organize in-person events since March 2020, so our goal was to maximize socializing amongst our peers in the safest way possible,” she explained.

“The mental health chairs at both campuses worked together to organize monthly events to bring our classes together, both to relax and to discuss heavier topics pertinent to maintaining mental health.” Rehman added. “The goal has generally been alternating monthly events that feature heavier subject matter one month and more lighthearted content the next. We’ve tried to provide a healthy balance of raising awareness about certain topics, while also providing outlets



Socially distanced outdoor yoga sessions provided students an opportunity to exercise both their minds and bodies.

some were initiated to address troubling societal events that caused additional anxiety.

“George Floyd’s death resulted in a spark that ignited national outrage,” Frederic emphasized. “As the only African American student on the class board from both campuses, I wanted to use this platform to ensure our voices were heard. In July 2020, DOs Connect worked with the KPCOM Student National Medical Association (SNMA) chapter to host a diversity panel for students to speak freely about their own experiences with racism and to help other students gain a better understanding of the everyday obstacles of being a minority.”

The diversity panel proved to be a resounding success thanks to the enthusiastic support of both class boards. “The safe space we created allowed students to share their personal stories of racism,” Frederic

added. “In October 2020, we held another event with the SNMA that featured an interactive conversation about what microaggressions are that offered students the opportunity to discuss their own experiences with them.”

### Collegial Compassion

Serving as a mental health chair adds significant responsibilities to an already packed student academic agenda. So, why are so many students so willing to devote their time to their classmates’ emotional well-being?

“When I was growing up, mental health was something heavily stigmatized by those around me. It was a common belief that such deep-rooted issues could simply be prayed away, and that failure to resolve the problem was the fault of the afflicted individual,” Frederic explained. “Having seen the toll such ignorance and intolerance

# WELLNESS CALENDAR

WEEK TWO

## GRATITUESDAY

### KLEIN SOCIETY

11:20 a.m.

FREE PANERA LUNCH  
FIRST FLOOR TAFT  
KLEIN MEMBERS ONLY

### LIPPMAN SOCIETY

11:20 a.m.

GOODY BAG HANDOUT  
FIRST FLOOR TAFT  
LIPPMAN MEMBERS ONLY

### KLEIN SOCIETY

5:00 p.m.

VIRTUAL PARTY  
ZOOM  
EVERYONE WELCOME

### SAACOFB

7:00 p.m.

WELLNESS PHYSICIAN PANEL  
ZOOM

## WELLNESS WEDNESDAY

### AMSA

AFTER LAB

GOODY BAG HANDOUT  
FIRST FLOOR TAFT

### DISASTER MEDICINE

7:00 a.m.

A TALK ON PTSD/MCI  
DEBRIEFING  
ZOOM  
RAFFLE FOR FREE  
FIRST AID KIT

## THINKING THURSDAY

NOTHING HERE—  
JUST DO SOMETHING NICE  
FOR YOURSELF TODAY.

AND TAKE PICTURES  
FOR THE RAFFLE!

## FEEL-GOOD FRIDAY

### MENTAL HEALTH CHAIR

DAVIE

7:00 p.m.

TALENT SHOW  
LAWN IN FRONT OF  
ALVIN SHERMAN LIBRARY

“To have a classmate who is dealing with the same struggles, but who can help you from a mental health perspective, that’s special. If we can help put a smile on even one student’s face, then we did something right.”

—Arielle Ashkenazi



took on those around me who suffered from a mental health condition, it has become an issue near and dear to my heart.”

Senath said she ran for the position “to destigmatize mental health issues and create an environment where people are comfortable talking about mental health. One of my larger goals is to encourage my peers to feel comfortable about discussing mental health, their struggles, and asking for help when they need it vs. struggling silently,” she stressed. “Being able to connect with my classmates allows us to create events that are tailored to the needs of the individual classes. If we want to be the best physicians we can be and promote wellness to the communities we will be serving in the future, we need to take care of ourselves and ensure we are in the best mental space.”

For Ashkenazi, who admits to spending “a lot of time in my life trying to understand my brain and my mental health,” doing her part to help her fellow students is a privilege she doesn’t take lightly. “I think the perspective of a student mental health chair is very different than providing the class with a mental health professional who is not a student,” she concluded. “To have a classmate who is dealing with the same struggles, but who can help you from a mental health perspective, that’s special. If we can help put a smile on even one student’s face, then we did something right.” □

Left: The student mental health chairs coordinated numerous wellness activities throughout the pandemic to keep their peers engaged, entertained, and informed.





# MENTAL MATTERS

## KPCOM AND NSU FOCUS ON STUDENT WELL-BEING

BY JOEY GARCIA, B.S.

The daily life of a college student is a constant juggling act that aims to keep academic, personal, and financial worries in balance. By adding the intensity that is medical school, along with a prolonged pandemic, that balancing act may be too much to handle if students become overwhelmed by the many stressors in their environment.

Because it focuses on a holistic approach to medicine, the Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine (KPCOM) recognizes that overall wellness is greatly driven by a positive state of mental health. Accordingly, the KPCOM has taken additional steps to provide its students with resources to address their mental health needs.

### Prioritizing Wellness

To better prepare its students, the KPCOM has been offering a student wellness course for several years as part of its first-year curriculum, with the course directors and other administrators constantly striving to make the sessions meaningful and applicable to everyday life.

“The interactive sessions focus on different areas that are critical to student wellness, such as mindfulness, as well as academic, physical, personal, relational, and nutritional wellness,” said Hilda De Gaetano, D.O., M.S., FAAP, FACOP, associate dean of preclinical education. “The Student Wellness course also provides students with contact information for various resources

that are available to help achieve and maintain wellness.”

This support extends far beyond the first-year classroom, as the KPCOM’s Office of Student Affairs makes sure students are aware of all the mental health services the college and university provide, not only during their initial orientation, but via constant email reminders. By strategically appointing student mental health chairs at the Fort Lauderdale/Davie and Tampa Bay Regional campuses, the chairs offer peer support and a vital resource. As a result of the pandemic, this support is currently provided through Zoom events that focus on wellness, open discussions, and game nights, which serve as a way to prevent

burnout while being a point of contact for more severe needs.

“I think the students are happy to know the services are there if they need them, but they are sometimes hesitant to reach out,” said Delia Harper-Celestine, Ed.D., M.P.H., assistant dean of student affairs. “The dean always encourages students to reach out for help if needed, and we are very careful in protecting our students’ confidentiality and making sure they view us as trustworthy. Those that need help and use the offered services tend to be happy with the results.”

### **Henderson Effect**

Aside from the in-house KPCOM resources, Nova Southeastern University (NSU) students are also made aware of the primary mental health services available through NSU’s partnership with Henderson Behavioral Health as part of the NSU Center for Student Counseling and Well-Being (CSCW). Led by Debra Futterman, LCSW, the center has been providing comprehensive behavioral health services to the student body since 2010, with a steady increase in utilization during the past five years.

“NSU has been very responsive to the growing demand for behavioral health services, and we are pleased to have received an increase in the number of available clinicians through our contract as we move into this next school year,” Futterman said. “The number of students served at the CSCW is about 10 percent of the university’s student population.”

When using the center’s services, students have access to 10 free sessions, along with an initial screening session. This offer is

available at the Fort Lauderdale/Davie and regional campuses thanks to the telehealth services offered as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students can set up their initial appointment through the CSCW web page, where they will be further instructed on the counseling process.

“Henderson was quick to respond to the needs of the NSU student body at the start of the pandemic. By April 1, 2020, we launched our HIPAA-compliant telehealth platform, making it possible for students

in such challenging times. In fact, there has even been an increase in students expressing they are anxious and stressed out at this time, not just because of COVID-19, but also as a result of limited social activities and figuring out new ways to cope.

Similarly, the pandemic has helped grow the services provided by NSU’s Center for Student Counseling and Well-Being. The result was a positive reception to the digital campaigns rolled out since summer 2020, primarily

## **NSU’s Center for Student Counseling and Well-Being offers 10 free telehealth sessions, plus an initial screening.**

to engage in services from their personal electronic devices via video sessions,” Futterman explained. “Both in-person and telehealth services will be available to the students at the start of the 2021–2022 academic year to increase access.”

### **Shattering Stigmas**

Having various mental health resources is one thing. Whether or not the students will access them is another. As the topic gains more exposure, and more people open up about their struggles, the viewpoint regarding mental health issues may shift from outdated assumptions of those seeking aid being crazy, dependent on pills, or having some form of handicap.

At NSU’s KPCOM, students are frequently made aware of the support they have from their peers and college, especially

regarding the creation of community care coaches to lessen the stigma associated with connecting to supportive services.

“While stigma still exists around mental health, NSU has done an incredible job of working to decrease it amongst its students,” Futterman concluded. “To further this initiative, the NSU Student CARE Team was created almost two years ago to provide support for students’ well-being and academic success by connecting students in need with campus and community resources. The purpose of the team is to serve as the coordinating hub of existing resources. It is focused on the prevention and early intervention of students experiencing distress, feeling overwhelmed, or engaging in harmful or disruptive behavior.” □

# Heartaches *and* Healing

## CAN-D.O. SPIRIT HELPS STUDENT SURVIVE STRUGGLES

BY JOEY GARCIA, B.S.

At first glance, Halford Warlick IV seems to be a typical first-year Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine (KPCOM) student who possesses the drive to follow his passions and set himself apart from his peers. However, as one often discovers, there's usually more to people than meets the eye.

Such is the case with Warlick, who has dealt with the loss of three loved ones, fought an internal battle with his sexuality, and overcome mental and physical illnesses—all while maintaining a focus on becoming a physician.

### **Battles with Loss**

Warlick, who was adopted from Moscow, Russia, when he was 22-months-old, grew up in Spartanburg, South Carolina, where he was raised by his mother Sandy, a kindergarten teacher, and his father Gaines, a home salesman. His upbringing in the Deep South can best be described as a routine of traditional values, spending time playing video games, watching Disney movies, and enjoying the companionship of his nieces and nephew.

“Sundays were church days, along with fried chicken and sweet tea,” Warlick recalled. “Nothing in the world can ever beat southern hospitality, and the respect we were taught to show our guests and families is something I will never lose. My childhood was unique. It definitely shaped me into who I am today.”

Warlick would relish those happy times for a few more years until his life started to take a negative turn near the end of his high school education, when his mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2014. Warlick, who was about to start his first year as a Clemson University student, was told the disease was treatable—a decision made to protect Warlick so he could begin his university experience on a positive note.

Despite the reassuring news of his mother's chances of survival, Warlick sought more answers about his mother's condition. Because he wanted to further understand the complexity of the body, Warlick chose biology as his major.

On October 6, 2015, Warlick's mother passed away. Four months

later, his maternal grandmother died following a heart attack and stroke. Three years later, his paternal grandmother suddenly passed away from septic shock after what was thought to be a minor procedure. Each loss served as a blow that opened up a whirlwind of emotions, memories, and the question of how does one keep going?

“Losing the ones closest to you, the ones who understand you, and the ones who accept you unconditionally during your first year of college is devastating and life-changing,” Warlick affirmed. “I was in disbelief but had to continue college. I went through months of struggles after losing my last remaining grandmother and realized that the only way for me to move forward was to accept reality and process my grief.”

### **Battles with Self**

That same thought process was one Warlick would use as he began to deal with another challenge—his sexuality. Coming from the South, where traditional values are instilled at an early age, one's sexual orientation wasn't a simple topic



to bring up to one's family, no matter how close the family is.

"I always enjoyed talking to girls as friends, but I never felt anything other than that," Warlick recalled. "I was never given the chance to notice I was attracted to guys, because most of my family told me it was wrong and consistently used their faith as a crutch. This told me that something was inherently flawed within myself, and that has been quite a mess for me to untangle over the years."

Learning to cope is something several members of Warlick's family are still struggling with as well. Although his mother passed away before he came out, Warlick was able to be up-front about being gay to his family. Despite the news being met with major pushbacks, as he expected, Warlick also received key support. "If it were not for my aunts, cousin, and great friends validating that I am okay, medical school would have never happened," Warlick said.

"Most of my family remains firm in their beliefs, and that is their personal choice," he added. "They are entitled to their opinions, and it is just something we do not discuss. Part of me wants to change this dynamic into pure acceptance, but I have to realize this may never change."

While at Clemson, Warlick had to face a similar ordeal in taking that first step in coming out to his friends and awaiting how they would receive the news. Fortunately, Warlick had a much more accepting reception from most of his college friends. Still, Warlick wasn't out of the woods yet, as the constant invalidation of his sexuality, along with the passing of several close loved ones, would lead him to face another battle—mental illness.

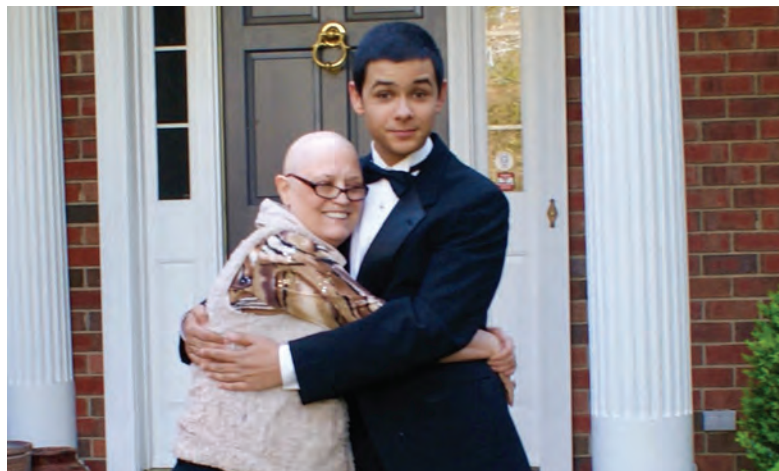
### Battles with the Mind

Suddenly, it wasn't just grief Warlick was feeling. Despite overcoming many obstacles, Warlick realized he was developing issues regulating his emotions, along with mood swings that always seemed to center around how others perceived him. By the time he entered his junior year at Clemson, Warlick found himself overreacting when people would exclude him from social events and always felt alone and abandoned—feelings he

could never quite understand.

"There was a time when I didn't think I could keep going," Warlick admitted.

As the emotional struggles intensified, Warlick sought treatment, starting with seeing a therapist who diagnosed him with borderline personality disorder (BPD)—a mental health condition characterized by difficulty regulating emotions, problems understanding effective interpersonal communication,



Top: Warlick hugs his mom Sandy before going to his junior prom.

Above: (standing, from left) are Warlick's paternal grandmother Betty, aunt Cathy, and mom Sandy. Seated is Warlick's maternal grandmother Mildred.



Left: Warlick with his aunt Leigh

Below: Warlick during his recovery from a surgical complication in March 2021

and an intense fear of abandonment. Although he was initially appalled to hear the news, Warlick knew this was the beginning of his mental healing.

Now that he had a diagnosis, the next step involved proactive treatment—a journey that involved the difficult decision to take a semester off from college during his junior year. Warlick began to navigate the many obstacles he was facing by learning to surf his emotions like waves, understand radical acceptance, and abstain from alcohol and mood-altering substances that temporarily, but falsely, numb intense emotions. One technique Warlick keeps handy is the “cold-water” trick. Whenever he is anxious, Warlick places his hand in cold water, and his sympathetic nervous system calms down after 20 seconds.

“This is an ongoing battle, but I have coping skills, friends, and my faith to lean on when I get stuck,” he emphasized. “Stressors sometimes test my skills and have set me back multiple times, but I have to remind myself that this is just part of life. I do not think my mental health



**“Stressors sometimes test my skills and have set me back multiple times, but I have to remind myself that this is just part of life.”**

**—Halford Warlick IV**

issues will ever be cured, but I know I can be as happy and healthy as anyone else as long as I use what I have learned.”

### Ongoing Battles

After graduating from Clemson with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biological Sciences, Warlick took a gap year, which he spent working as an emergency department medical scribe with ScribeAmerica

in Spartanburg, South Carolina. While there, Warlick accompanied physicians in the fast-paced environment of the emergency room, processing patient information, creating patient charts, and learning the basics of patient care.

Warlick’s turmoil continued, however, when his paternal grandmother passed away later that year and he unintentionally became dependent on clonazepam—a medication prescribed to him for insomnia and panic attacks. “It was a lifesaver at first. I felt like I was finally who people expected me to be until I realized I wanted to quit and noticed my body was physiologically dependent on it to function,” he explained.

“I had to undergo a painful, medically supervised taper involving an unexpected seizure that tested my strength to be able to start medical school the following year,” he continued. “This is part of the reason I am highly interested in psychiatry, because I want to make sure patients are aware of the risks associated with their medications—something I was never informed about until I tried to stop.”

When it came to selecting a medical school, Warlick knew his preference was to be in South Florida, where he received BPD treatment during his semester break from Clemson. “The osteopathic profession has always appealed to me because it incorporates a holistic approach to medicine and more conservative prescribing practices,” he said. “Combine sunny South Florida and Nova Southeastern University, and it was a no-brainer.”

Starting medical school in the midst of a pandemic wasn’t the ideal situation. However, Warlick has



relied on his learned positivity skills to better his outcomes. This included being a National Health Service Corps scholarship program recipient, which involves a full scholarship for physicians committed to serving populations that need health care providers in underserved areas and/or specialties following residency completion.

Warlick, who aims to work with individuals who need psychiatric health care, has also developed a passion for psychopharmacology and hopes to conduct research during his residency training to learn more about the mind and how it works. His specific interests lie in benzodiazepine pharmacology and ways to help patients taper off these medications with minimal complications.

“Knowing that my mother and grandmothers would want me to continue pursuing my dreams in medical school is what gives me the drive to live,” Warlick said. “I still have my struggles, and always will, but I have to remember that each and every one of us do as well. It is how we move through, learn, and grow from them that defines the meaning of empathy itself—something every physician should have.” □



## LIFE AND DEATH BATTLE

In March 2021, while Warlick was undergoing a minor outpatient procedure, the surgeon accidentally nicked an artery. Two weeks later, it hemorrhaged, causing Warlick to be rushed to the hospital after he went into hypovolemic shock.

Warlick required four units of blood and platelet transfusions, as well as immediate vascular surgery, to restore his blood volume. “I almost died—and saw my life flash before my eyes,” he said.

While recovering from the second surgery, Warlick contracted a bacterial infection that required yet another hospitalization. Although his recovery was progressing slowly but well, Warlick needed to make

a difficult decision. “NSU and I agreed that since my recovery is extensive, and I will have to make up seven weeks of missed coursework, it is best that I graduate a year later,” Warlick explained.

Although Warlick was already separated from his classmates due to the pandemic, distance didn’t stop his KPCOM class of 2024 classmates from showing their support. “Imagine having friends bring you flowers, as well as invite their friends to help bring you dinner and take you to and from your doctor appointments,” he said. “That is the KPCOM class of 2024, and I am super proud to be part of it, as well as the new class of 2025.”



Frontline workers at the Foundation for Sickle Cell Disease Research

# REDI FOR CHANGE

## STUDENT INITIATIVE ASSISTS THE UNDERSERVED

BY ANEIL TAWAKALZADA

According to the Foundation for Sickle Cell Disease Research (FSCDR) in Hollywood, Florida, the Sunshine State has the highest rates of sickle cell disease (SCD) births in the United States, with the majority of SCD patients living in the tricounty area (Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach). SCD patients in Florida pay approximately \$630 million on treatment, nearly 80 percent of which is spent in emergency departments.

In addition to high rates of sickle cell disease, Florida is home to many underserved communities

suffering from food insecurity. Adults and children who are food insecure are at an increased risk for a variety of negative health outcomes, including birth defects, anemia, cognitive problems, aggression, and anxiety.

In an effort to make a difference, the class of 2023 and class of 2024

class boards at the Fort Lauderdale/Davie and Tampa Bay Regional campuses partnered with the college's Student National Medical Association (SNMA) chapter to establish the Medical Students REDI for Change initiative. REDI, an acronym for rallying to end disparities and inequalities,

**Thanks to the KPCOM students, the organization was able to cover food expenses and two months of operational costs.**



## REDI, an acronym for rallying to end disparities and inequalities, showcased the purpose of the campaign, which spanned the entirety of Black History Month.

showcased the purpose of the campaign, which spanned the entirety of Black History Month. Second-year students and class leaders Ted Frederic, Nadia Anderson, and I, along with first-year student Nayeem Chowdhury, worked alongside their classmates to help implement the campaign and raise funds.

After weeks of planning, Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine (KPCOM) students partnered with Village (Free)dge—a Miami-based nonprofit organization that places community refrigerators in different locations throughout Florida—to provide underserved communities with access to nutritious food. Additionally, KPCOM students partnered with the FSCDR to provide SCD patients with access to affordable, high-quality treatment.

The students used social media to spread awareness of the campaign.

Alongside the social media takeover, the SNMA hosted a panel discussion on racism as a public health issue that offered students and faculty members an opportunity to discuss health care disparities.

By the campaign's end, KPCOM students raised \$9,579 for underserved communities and SCD patients in Florida. "We were happy to provide relief for community members, while also spreading awareness of misconceptions and stigmas surrounding minority groups and sickle cell disease," said Frederic, who helped link the KPCOM students with the two nonprofit organizations.

Through donations to Village (Free)dge, the students provided underserved South Floridians with fresh, nutritious meals. More specifically, homeless people were given sandwiches, fruit, granola bars, chips, sliced bread, deli meats, and water, while those living in

halfway homes and shelters were given nutritious, microwavable meals, as well as bags of fresh produce for cooking.

According to Sherina Jones, founder of Village (Free)dge, the organization feeds 85 to 150 needy individuals each day. Thanks to the KPCOM students, the organization was able to cover food expenses and two months of operational costs.

A monetary donation to the FSCDR helped provide SCD patients with assistance getting to and from treatment centers. It also provided patients access to telemedicine checkups, which allowed them to obtain quality care from the comfort of their homes. According to Kyla Thorpe, chief operating officer at the FSCDR, the KPCOM's generosity helped provide SCD-related aid to more than 25 patients.

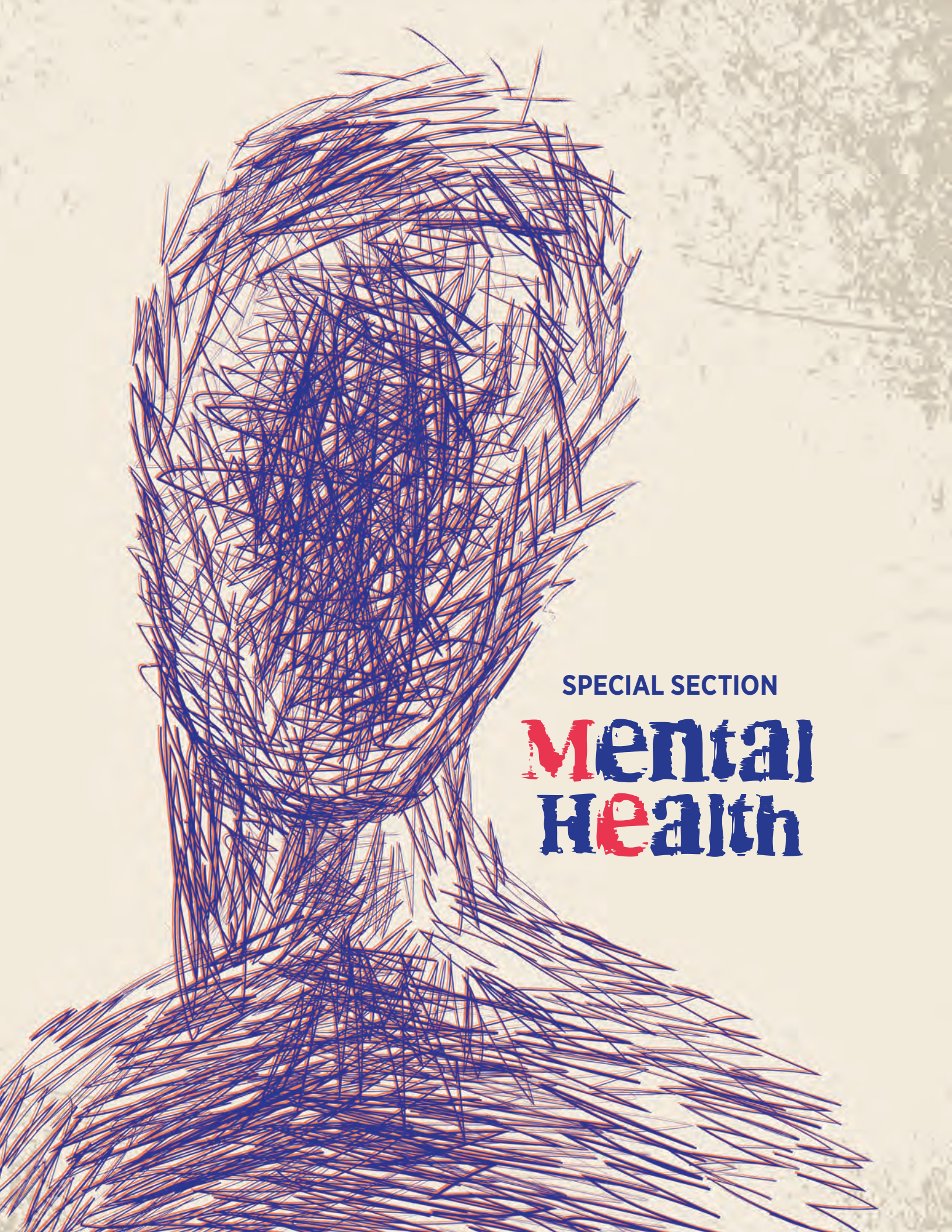
However, the KPCOM students weren't done yet. Student leaders partnered with AMBOSS, Princeton Review, and Kaplan to provide international medical students with free board preparation resources, as well as provide undergraduate students with free MCAT preparation resources. Through these partnerships, international medical students in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe were awarded free AMBOSS board preparation resources. "KPCOM students are always willing to get involved to help make the world a better place," said Tawakalzada. "They continue to inspire me, each and every day." □

*Aneil Tawakalzada is a second-year KPCOM student.*



Grateful South Floridians await food distribution from Village (Free)dge.





SPECIAL SECTION

**Mental  
Health**



# Raw and Unraveled

BY BIJAL PATEL

It is no secret that the pandemic has had an impact on mental health everywhere. I came into 2020 as healthy as I could be, both mentally and physically. If something or someone was not adding to my life, I would simply remove the negative energy and focus on the positive. The self-love I had spent years cultivating was being exemplified daily through all my actions, such as exercising, eating healthy, or focusing on my relationships with my close friends and family.

Then the pandemic struck. A part of my life felt taken away, and I knew the next few years would be difficult to handle. I knew that the time I had put aside for myself during my gap year would only be the time I will never have again. The calm before the storm, I would say—the storm being my journey to become a physician, where I will be sacrificing a lot of my time and self to be the best for my future patients.

The first thing to go was the gym—my safe haven at the time—where I bore out all my frustrations from my personal life. Then my friends. We spent months on FaceTime and Zoom, but it wasn't the same as seeing each other in person. Eventually, the things I was looking forward to before starting medical school were being taken away, and it started to tear away at my spirit. It was all too fast and not in my control.

My anxiety started to worsen, and the coping mechanisms I spent years building were being reversed. I couldn't handle what was being thrown my way as I did previously. Each day felt like impending doom. The worry of the future—my future—was something I couldn't see clearly.

Fast-forward to starting medical school, where I spent most of my time alone in my apartment, just trying to stay afloat with the waves of information coming my way. The days started to blend, and the stress and lack of sleep started to take a real toll. There was nothing I could do to prepare for this. I knew medical school was going to be difficult; however, I would have never thought it would take place during a pandemic.

As my mental health deteriorated, I realized it was difficult for me to ask for help from the people I loved the most. I tried to pick myself up day after day, yet it didn't seem to be enough.

Then, my ninth-grade biology teacher reached out to me. She told me she was so proud of how far I had come and that she was always supporting me from the sidelines. This small interaction meant the world to me, and it paved the way to my making healthier choices. I started to slowly do the things I was consistently doing before the pandemic—slowly starting to see me again.

*Bijal Patel is a first-year KPCOM student.*



**I knew medical school was going to be difficult; however, I would have never thought it would take place during a pandemic.**

# COVID-19 and Student Mental Health

BY CHRISTI M. NAVARRO, PH.D., M.S.



In fall 2019, I assigned a group project to the students in my Community Health courses. They could choose any public health topic that interested them, with the caveat that their target for the health promotion project was the Nova Southeastern University (NSU) community.

I was surprised that out of nine project groups in my morning and afternoon classes, six of them (67 percent) chose mental health or stress-related topics. The subsequent needs assessments illustrated that mental health and wellness were prominent concerns on campus, academic and personal issues were the lead stressors, and students mostly reached out to family and friends for help.

Mental health is a major issue facing every community and is the leading cause of disability in the United States and Europe. Before the pandemic, one in five adults (20 percent) in the United States experienced a mental illness annually. That rate increases for college students, with more than 25 percent having been diagnosed

or treated by a mental health professional. A recent study found that, globally, 35 percent of first-year college students showed symptoms of one of the common mental health disorders like anxiety or depression.

While college students may be prone to anxiety and depression, the issues associated with this pandemic year—COVID-19, systemic racism and inequality, and political unrest—have resulted in added stressors and increased rates of mental illness. According

Understanding Mental Health as Public Health was designed to explore mental health from a public health perspective, using the socioecological approach as a unifying framework. The honors-level Exploring Population Mental Health and Well-Being course uses a multidisciplinary lens to examine social determinants of mental health among vulnerable populations.

The goal of both courses was to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to make

**“One activity I hold close to my heart is the love letter to self we did as one activity for our Feel Good Fridays. I wrote this letter when I was at a particularly low point and was writing that I loved myself, with the hope that one day I would. I actually found that same letter a few weeks ago, and I was able to reflect on how far I’ve come in a year.”**

—Hasibah Ahmed (senior)

to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 75 percent of young adults 18 to 24 years of age have reported poor mental health due to the pandemic, and nearly half of college students in the past year have experienced depression and/or anxiety.

In response to student interests and needs, the Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine Public Health program launched a Dimensions of Wellness course in 2019 and two mental health courses at the undergraduate level in 2020.

a positive impact as future leaders promoting healthy populations, with an emphasis on promotion and advocacy of positive mental health.

In addition to learning about population-level approaches to mental well-being, students added to their wellness “toolbox” by learning individual stress-reduction skills and coping strategies they could apply to their own situations or share with peers and family members. This was accomplished through Feel Good Fridays activities and a semester-long



**“I feel like the Understanding Mental Health as Public Health course was perfectly timed for me to take during COVID, because one of my biggest takeaways was that I am in control of my mental health and happiness.”**

—Adam Daren (senior)

**“I was able to learn more about how to be a better ally to those struggling with their mental health and became open to learning ways to best manage my own mental health.”**

—Matthew Calaigian, (senior)

**“I chose to take the Exploring Population Mental Health and Well-Being course because of its relevance to all of our lives, especially during a very transformative time, and because of its importance to overall public health.”**

—Nabiha Antiquzzaman (junior)

mental health passport project that challenged students to experience 10 dimensions of mental wellness.

Students were also given the opportunity to be trained in Mental Health First Aid—a course that teaches them how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of addictions and mental illnesses. To date, 36 students have received this three-year certification for free through a partnership with the United Way of Broward County.

The full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health is yet to be seen. Professionals in the education, public health, and mental health fields predict that the effects on students may persist for years. Universities can be part of the solution by helping students address their stressors and mental health challenges in a variety of ways.

NSU is on the right path, with a multidisciplinary Student CARE team that supports student

academic and personal wellness with a variety of resources, including counseling services, group education, and the Community CARE coaches—the new peer support program. It is my hope that these mental health courses

continue to provide an added value, creating a space where students—and faculty and community members alike—can turn the curve on mental health.

*Christi M. Navarro is an assistant professor of public health.*



# Getting Beyond Grief

BY SARINA GUPTA

I remember New Year's Eve 2018 like it was yesterday. My family had just left India after running a medical mission through our nonprofit organization, where my parents saved hundreds of lives through surgeries in Gujarat. We celebrated at our beautiful hotel in Vietnam, which hosted a rooftop party overlooking Ho Chi Minh City. This was supposed to be our time to relax and celebrate the success of our trip.

We should have been happy. I perhaps felt joy as everyone screamed the New Year's countdown. I smiled, the live band started playing music, and my family clinked champagne glasses. The moment 2019 began, however, my mom said, "I can't believe I'm entering a year without Dilan. How can I move on to a new year without my son?"

I would spend the night consoling her. Meanwhile, my father was so absentminded, he spilled champagne on the man next to him, who got mad. It broke my heart. When I lost Dilan, I lost dad, too. He became a ghost of who he was. I couldn't stand the sight of anyone causing him further pain.

This is how my family celebrated New Year's Eve the year my brother died. It had been more than six months since Dilan passed. I was afraid I forgot what mom's laugh sounded like. I was still waiting for dad's lame jokes. I was doing everything I could to keep my parents happy. I was proud of myself for that, but I wondered if my mother would ever go a full day without crying again.

Would my dad ever look at me again, rather than through me, as if I didn't exist? Was I doing enough to keep my sister happy? Would my family ever feel happiness again? Would I ever again feel comfortable enough to cry in front of someone, or would I always be alone with my tears? Would I ever be able to sleep through a night again without being awoken by nightmares of the day Dilan died?

I realized memories can kill if you let them. The thing about grief is, you simply must go through it to comprehend the gravity of loss. When you lose someone as significant as a brother, everything reminds you of him. Just when you think you have finally escaped the pain of remembering, the next



Dilan Gupta and his mom celebrate his 2014 high school graduation in New York.

song that comes up on shuffle is *100 Years* by Five for Fighting. Dilan never made it to 100 years. The pain is compounded by the lyrics, "22 for a moment." Song deleted. He died at 22. One day, 90 percent of songs are deleted. Time to begin again.

The bad news is, to make it to the other side, you must cross "the stages." And the stages will put every ounce of your sanity and strength to the test. They will tear you apart from the inside out and require you to hold back your tears at all costs when you are asked about your brother. They will require you to smile at strangers when you'd rather cry, to mask your sadness in hopes your parents will one day stop crying.

They will require you to wake up and go to work when you are not motivated to leave your bed. There will be times during the stages when you wonder if life is even worth living anymore. How could it be that your biggest supporter and role model is no longer with you,





Top: Dilan and Sarina Gupta after they skydived during a 2016 vacation in Miami, Florida.

Center: From left: Pictured at their parents' 25th wedding anniversary are Dilan and Sarina along with their sister, mother, maternal grandmother, maternal grandfather, and father.

Bottom: Childhood photo of Dilan and Sarina with their dad

at least physically. You might even pray that life does not have to last much longer. Until you cross.

When you make it to the other side of grief, everything in life becomes beautiful. The god-awful stages become worth it. Suddenly, getting up early to watch the sunrise means witnessing your brother as he brilliantly explodes the sky with a heartachingly gorgeous palette of colors. One day, you go from being too depressed to rise, to jumping out of bed with enthusiasm. Deep down, you know the best way you can honor your lost one is by living life to the fullest.

One day, you go from isolating yourself from everyone to becoming a passionate lover and risk-taker. Life is short, and you don't want to waste another second doing things that don't leave you breathless and madly in love with life. After the stages, your heart cannot break the same way, so you love deeply, allowing your heart to become vulnerable. Nothing and no one can ever lead you back to that dark place—not with your loved one watching over you, rooting for you, living life through you.

The good news is that holidays get easier. Life gets easier. Happiness can come back strong, with effort.

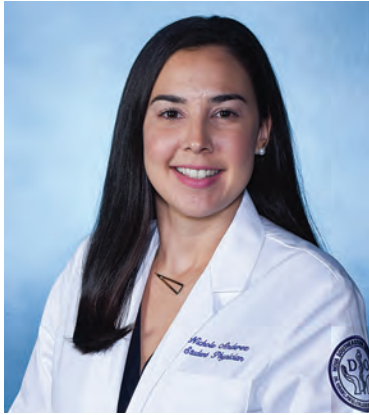
My family and I entered 2021 viewing old albums of Dilan, shedding only blissful tears. Tears that dripped onto our lips, wetting the laughter pouring from our hearts, as we recounted memories of good old days. We took turns storytelling, grinning from ear to ear. We are happy, together. And my brother? He is with us now more than ever. He never left. My family just had to learn how to open our hearts again.

*Sarina Gupta is a first-year KPCOM student.*



# The Rainbow Patient

BY NICHOLE ANDEREZ



As student physicians, the journey that begins during our White Coat Ceremony can take a toll on mental health, as evidenced by the increasing rates of physician burnout and suicide. Although I can attest to the competitive environment fostered by the medical education system, the experience can also contribute to the cultivation of strong friendships.

These relationships, and a supportive family, are what got me through the first two years of didactics, but I was hiding a big secret—a secret that was preventing me from reaching self-actualization. During my third-year rotations, I met a patient who brought me clarity: the rainbow patient.

The rainbow patient was a 16-year-old girl. Ironically, she was dressed in black from head to toe, wearing a hooded sweater with a long-sleeved shirt underneath, pants, and knee-high socks on a humid 80-degree day in Miami, Florida. She sat quietly on the exam table, looking down as she swung her feet. I then examined the rash she presented for. She was very hesitant to show me the rash. I could tell she

was feeling insecure and that there might be more going on.

After the exam, I began to explain the disease process, which surprised both my patient and her mother. Now, my patient was making eye contact with me, and I could tell I had her undivided attention. They asked me about my career plans, and I explained how I hoped to work with the adolescent population, particularly in the LGBTQ+ community. My patient's eyes lit up as she exclaimed, "Yes! I could totally see that." My gut knew she needed an ally.

Catching her off guard, her mother nudged her and said, "Why don't you tell her what you wanted to talk about?" She started looking back at her swinging feet. I grabbed a chair and scooted a little closer. "How do I find out about speaking to someone?" she timidly murmured as her mother started to cry.

A dialog ensued about prioritizing mental health and the difficulties associated with addressing questions of identity and sexuality. As part of the Latinx community, I am aware of the stigma surrounding mental health and LGBTQ+ topics. In that moment, I realized the significance of this conversation for LGBTQ+ youth, and how impactful it could have been for me during adolescence.

I looked my patient in the eye and said, "I am proud of you." Then, I turned to her mother and said, "You should be, too. Your daughter is strong enough to admit she needs help, and you made her feel comfortable enough to share that

with you." After I provided resources, such as the names of mental health counselors and LGBTQ+ groups, they thanked me for sitting with them and speaking candidly.

I finally felt like I made a significant impact on a patient. Simply taking a few extra minutes to educate my patient showed her that her needs were a priority to me. This was the first time I experienced an adolescent express her emotions about mental health and identity confusion. I refer to her as my rainbow patient, because this encounter emphasized the importance for me to be my most authentic self. My secret? As a third-year medical student, I had still not come out to my closest friends out of fear of rejection.

Coming out as part of the LGBTQ+ community has allowed me to be the best advocate for my patients. It lightened the load on my mental health, and now I am realizing my fullest potential. Patients like this demonstrate the importance of creating environments where they feel safe enough to seek care.

I hope this can be a reminder to us all to educate ourselves about the social matters that play such crucial roles in our patients' daily lives. Continued cultural awareness and social education will allow us to be prepared when faced with patients struggling with issues we have not ourselves experienced.

Sometimes, a safe space is not a place, but a person.

*Nichole Anderez is a third-year KPCOM student.*

*"Coming out  
as part of  
the LGBTQ+  
community  
has allowed  
me to be  
the best  
advocate for  
my patients."*

*—Nichole Anderez*





# Depression During Lockdown

BY LEROY SWAIN



It is well established in literature that the COVID-19 virus and the global response to it have resulted in a variety of mental health consequences. The World Health Organization has speculated that the measures taken, like self-isolation, can affect an individual's livelihood and increase loneliness, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and suicidal behavior.<sup>1</sup> The global lockdown resulted in millions of people losing their jobs, which resulted in much uncertainty for the future.<sup>2</sup>

During one of my clinical rotations, I met a wonderful woman who was a victim of these circumstances. She initially arrived in the emergency department due to congestive heart failure exacerbation, although she regularly visited the hospital with breathing difficulties.

Unfortunately, she went into acute respiratory failure and had to be intubated and cared for in the intensive care unit for a few days. Once her condition improved, I had the chance to speak with her to find out her story and discuss her case with my attending.

The patient weighed about 600 pounds when we first met. After some discussion, we realized that this patient repeatedly came to the hospital due to cardiac and pulmonary issues that stemmed from her excessive weight. The next day, I sat down and had a frank discussion with the patient regarding her frequent hospitalizations and her weight.

I learned that the nationwide lockdown had left her unemployed since March 2020. She had spiraled into a deep depression and would spend much of her days in bed consuming junk food to cope with the stress she was under. In addition to losing a job she enjoyed, she lost the opportunity to dance, which was her main form of physical activity.

She said she grew frustrated with people when they instructed her to "just lose the weight." I could see that this frustration stemmed from no one taking the time to understand what was pushing her to rely on this poor coping strategy. After the discussion, she received resources that could help her

---

**The stress brought upon us from the nationwide lockdown, including the unprompted creation of uncertainties, has led many individuals to cope in various ways.**

---

manage her mental health and start her on the path to a healthy lifestyle.

The stress brought upon us from the nationwide lockdown, including the unprompted creation of uncertainties, has led many individuals to cope in various ways. Because of the rise of distress in individuals experiencing major changes in life, such as family members grieving the loss of loved ones and overworked health care workers on the front lines, we must not forget to prioritize our mental health.

This further emphasizes, along with current literature, that we need to advise and reinforce healthy and safe coping strategies for those who might be showing signs of poor mental health.

*Leroy Swain is a third-year KPCOM student.*

- 
1. World Health Organization. (2020c). Mental health and COVID-19; available from [euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-technical-guidance/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak-technical-guidance-europe/mental-health-and-covid-19](https://euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-technical-guidance/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak-technical-guidance-europe/mental-health-and-covid-19).
  2. Kumar, A, KR, Nayar. COVID 19 and its mental health consequences. *Journal of Mental Health*, 2020. 180(6): p. 817-8.



# Is There a Doctor in the House?

BY ALICIA MCCARTNEY



I tried my best to angle the iPad to give my physician preceptor a decent view of the patient. The room was dark, and the patient was sleeping on his side, half under a blanket, so this was difficult. “I just gave him something for anxiety an hour ago, and he’s still out,” floated the voice of the patient’s nurse from outside of the iPad camera’s viewing range.

“Okay, that’s fine; let’s move on,” replied my preceptor. I wondered if my preceptor could even see the patient through the iPad at all, or if he knew which nurse was speaking to him. Oh well, on to the next room we went. My preceptor and I were rounding on the inpatient psychiatric unit together, except my preceptor was in a city nearly 100 miles

away, and I was carrying the iPad that allowed him to see the patients.

I knew many people were working from home during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, but I was surprised to find psychiatrists who manage inpatient hospital care to be among this group. When I initially arrived on the psychiatric unit for my clinical rotation in December 2020, I discovered that no psychiatrist had come in person to see the hospitalized patients since March.

The only people with the word “doctor” in their titles who had set foot onto the locked psychiatric unit in the past nine months were student doctors like me. An eerie sensation of extra responsibility settled on my shoulders. It did not fully lift until my time on the psychiatric unit ended.

Much of a medical assessment can be done without ever touching the patient. It is easy to determine “sick” or “not sick” with an initial glance, especially in person. While some things, like level of consciousness, can be easily picked up via telehealth, more subtle findings like pallor, mild tremors, or sweaty

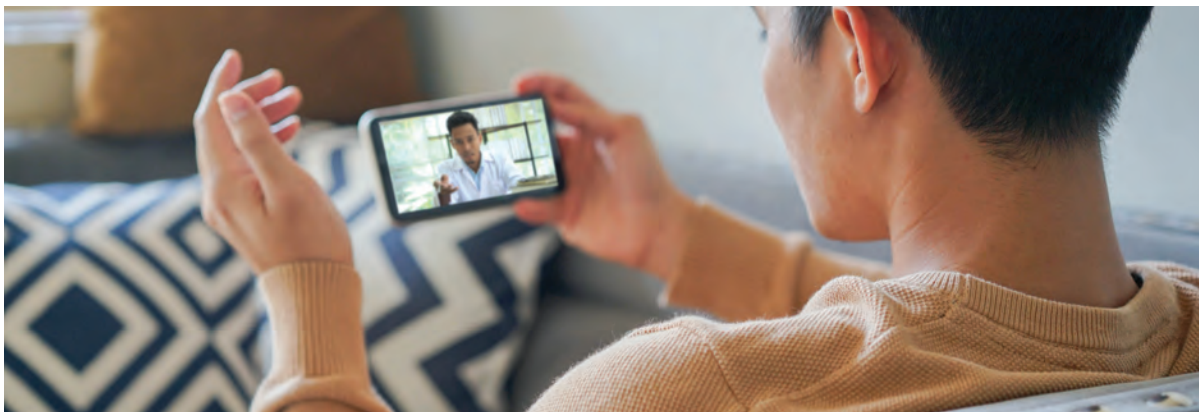
palms might not, especially with dim lighting and a grainy Wi-Fi connection. In the world of psychiatry, where small variations in body language and observable signs can change a diagnosis, those little details matter.

Many recent studies have found that telehealth visits are generally safe and effective for the continuing psychiatric care of stable outpatients. However, there is a world of difference between stable psychiatric patients and patients who are actively suicidal, psychotic, detoxing, or otherwise sick enough to need treatment on a monitored inpatient psychiatric unit. I still remain skeptical of the adequacy of telehealth visits for this group.

Telehealth, though, was all we had. I suppose it was better than the alternative of no psychiatrist at all.

I started to ask my preceptor a question after we “rounded” on the last patient, but he had signed off before I had the chance. Oh well. Like the patients, I would just hope I’d manage to snag a few minutes of his time tomorrow—via the iPad.

*Alicia McCartney is a third-year KPCOM student.*



# Running Toward My Problems

BY LAURA GORENSHTEIN



Laura Gorenstein and her dad triumphantly cross the finish line at a marathon they competed in.

Like many high achievers, I have dealt with mental health obstacles. There have been many points in my life I have considered to be my “lows.” In the moment, these low points are excruciating, as I feel both mentally and physically incapacitated. But, as time passes, I am able to appreciate these lows and reflect.

My first major low came when I was an undergraduate student at New York University (NYU). Hours away from the small town where I grew up, I felt the true weight of being alone. I was set to transfer to a school closer to home, but I knew I needed to give myself the chance to be happy in New York City first.

I decided to train for a half-marathon and texted my dad, asking him to run it with me in a few months. That night, we both signed up despite neither of us having ever run more than a few miles on occasion. The training was grueling, as we often rose before the sun and ran until our legs felt like they might crumble beneath us.

But as the days passed us by, I no longer feared the early rising or the pain that came with it, and I was

able to truly embrace the beauty of it all. Running had now become my escape. Occasionally, I’d be joined by a friend, but the most dependable person has always been my dad. There’s rarely a time I visit home that we don’t go for a morning run—a tradition I cherish greatly.

Throughout my remaining time at NYU, I found myself using my new escape tool regrettably less than before. I had just run my first marathon, but shortly after, I found myself at another low point. Running completely disappeared from my life, and my only goal was to make it out of bed each day.

This became my new routine until I glanced at the medal I received after running my first marathon one day and decided it was time to train for my second. So, just like before, I texted my partner in crime—my dad—to train with me.

When COVID-19 hit and quarantine began, I once again found myself in a slump. I knew I needed to find a way to exercise, and that’s when I purchased a stationary bike. Immediately, my mental and physical health were on the rise again. Just as I had done many times before, I pulled myself out of my low by challenging myself physically and mentally.

Exercise has become a constant in my life. While it sometimes takes the back seat, I know it’ll always be there. I’m excited for the day that running outside becomes a constant in my life again. But for now, I will ride my bike and cherish my running memories that have gotten me through the hardest times in my life, as well as those who have joined me for runs, especially my dad—my greatest running companion.

*Laura Gorenstein is a second-year KPCOM student.*

# Running from Isolation

BY JILLIAN LEIBOWITZ AND JOSHUA BERKO



Jillian Leibowitz and Joshua Berko train for their inaugural half-marathon.

Medical school is a marathon, not a sprint. We learn this from the first day we put on our white coats. Not only do we navigate the uncharted waters of didactics and clinical education, but we dive deeper within ourselves to focus better, cope with stress, make new connections with our peers, and figure out who we want to be as individuals, colleagues, and future physicians.

It is a slow process we take on, and the stress can be overbearing. While everyone finds their own niche, hobby, or stress release, we found our own—running.

We have always been casual runners, but running became our only escape from the COVID-19 lockdowns, as we found ourselves mentally drained and physically exhausted after long days in the clinic. Running became a pastime, a reenergizing force, and an outlet for decompression and camaraderie after a long day.

Earlier this year, we decided to take our method of stress release and amplify our goals toward

something new—a half-marathon. The journey began when we set our goals, devised a schedule, and submitted our registrations.

Training for a half-marathon with a running partner gave us stability and a sense of togetherness in our mental and physical struggles. We spent our long runs at a casual pace, opening up to one another after a hard week, and used our tempo runs to channel our frustrations and push one another verbally and sometimes physically. If one of us was having an off day, we could push and motivate one another to accomplish our training goal.

Race day came quickly, but we were ready. Together, we had set a race plan and were ready to trust our hard work. We started strong as we settled into our pretrained rhythm for the first 9 miles. As we climbed the bridge connecting A1A to Las Olas Boulevard in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, our anxieties escalated like concrete under our feet as the last 4.1 miles lay before us.

We accelerated our pace and diverted our focus from the creeping physical exhaustion as we pushed for the finish line. As we crossed the 13.1-mile mark below our target time, we both collapsed in exhaustion and euphoria after completing the achievement we had worked toward for more than four months.

We learned that whatever you are going through, you are not alone. We learned the importance of communication and having a solid support system. Lastly, we learned that the best way to overcome any obstacle is to take it one step at a time, keep putting one foot in front of the other—and remember to breathe.

*Jillian Leibowitz is a fourth-year student, and Joshua Berko is a third-year student.*





# Blooming Through the Storm

BY MONICA SCITURRO



With many of my usual mental health outlets stunted during the pandemic, I decided to take on a new hobby that wouldn't require leaving my apartment and would provide healthy breaks from the usual daily 10 hours of screen time. As someone who has never had a green thumb, I initially didn't see it as something that would be super successful, but rather as a fun challenge.

It started simply with a tomato plant from The Home Depot, which progressed to a relatively diverse little garden over the past year. I soon added the bottom ends of green onions that would usually get thrown away and garlic that had sprouted in the pantry. One of my classmates, Mo Salhab, also enjoys gardening, so we decided to exchange seeds and sprouts.

My boyfriend contributed as well, giving me sunflower and marigold seeds. Within a few months, I convinced my roommate to graciously let me take over our balcony with sunflowers, tomatoes, lettuce, garlic, onions, basil, rosemary, and parsley.

Although the learning curve has been disheartening at times, the trials and mistakes have also provided comic relief along the way. I have found the occasional worm in my onions and have had to find creative ways to fend off various other pests. I even received a text from my roommate one night that a few of my plants had blown off of our second-floor balcony onto the sidewalk below. Let's just say checking the weather and wind forecasts is now part of my daily routine.

It has been extremely therapeutic for me to spend time gardening and nurturing something that started from a seed or a tiny sprout. I have also appreciated having a beautiful study spot outside or a relaxing environment to take breaks in. It's exciting to see the progress and the growth that can occur in just a few short days. It's even more rewarding when you see the end result a few months later.

Not only has this newfound hobby benefited my mental health, but it has also improved my physical health, as I am able to eat herbs and vegetables that are fresh and organic. Although I'm biased, the taste of restaurant or grocery store salads can't compare to my homegrown ones.

The process of medical school is fatiguing. As a second-year student who juggled three semesters of osteopathic principles and practice in three months along with classes and board exam studies, I can confirm that it takes a significant toll on one's mental health. I have seen firsthand the importance in finding mental health outlets that bring you joy during what can be very dark times.

There will definitely be trials throughout our journey as students and as doctors, but it's important to remember that, as with my newfound hobby, one day we will be the ones nurturing our own patients and checking on their progress every day. However, in order to successfully achieve that goal, we must first take care of ourselves.

*Monica Scitirro is a second-year KPCOM student.*









# Prioritizing Student Wellness

BY LAUREN BROWN AND DARBY OAKES



Lauren Brown



Darby Oakes

It's no secret that medical school requires sacrifice and total dedication for four years—and beyond. Among the many sacrifices, free time is one of the most significant things we surrender once we don our white coats.

Our time is dominated by studying, clinical rotations, lectures, research, interest clubs, volunteering, case presentations, conferences, and even more studying. We know firsthand that medical students devote most of their time toward building their résumés so they can land their dream residency positions, while often neglecting their mental and physical health in the process. That's why we wanted to discover how Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine (KPCOM) students felt their health had changed since starting their journey to becoming a physician.

As an assignment for our Research Methods in Public Health course with Dr. Nicole Cook in the winter 2020 semester, we surveyed 110 of our peers about their nutritional and exercise habits since starting medical school. The results made it evident that the majority of students struggle to maintain their baseline health while in medical school.

Based on the survey results, nearly 54 percent of the students felt their overall health had declined since beginning medical school. Furthermore, 40 percent

said their diets had worsened, 50 percent said their physical fitness level had declined, and 76 percent revealed that not having enough time was the main factor preventing them from exercising more.

Nearly 52 percent ate fast food 1 or 2 times a week, 11 percent reported doing so 3 or 4 times a week, and about 5 percent ate fast food 5 to 7+ times a week. Only about 15 percent rated their diet as “very healthy,” while 12 percent rated their physical fitness level as “very good.”

Exercise and nutrition are essential for optimal mental and physical performance and help to stave off many chronic diseases, including diabetes, hypertension, and depression. These statistics are alarming, because, as medical students, we are well aware of the effects exercise and nutrition have on our physical and mental health.

The irony of health professionals taking care of others' health while neglecting their own is, in reality, quite concerning. We hope that by sharing these statistics, students can realize they are not alone in the struggle to prioritize their health.

Although lifestyle modifications can be difficult to make while enduring a demanding curriculum, it is imperative to make mental and physical health a priority.

We cannot reach our full potential as future physicians if we are pouring from an empty cup. Since the distribution of our survey almost two years ago, two significant changes have occurred: a new KPCOM curriculum (including a course in nutrition) and the COVID-19 pandemic.

These have presented both unique challenges and advantages that further enforce the importance of maintaining wellness. Our hope is that these new circumstances have given KPCOM students a chance to reflect upon the health of their bodies, minds, and spirits and allowed them to make positive changes.

*Lauren Brown and Darby Oakes are third-year KPCOM students.*





# Strength in Vulnerability

BY RACHEL PRAY



My first semester of medical school was very difficult. Moving 1,300+ miles to a new state with no family or friends nearby, working through a breakup that happened one month into the semester, and feeling completely overwhelmed with academic classes were a few things that heavily weighed on me every day.

I felt trapped in a vicious cycle of anxiety and impostor syndrome, with nothing to do but study while simultaneously feeling like all the studying I was doing would not be good enough. I felt like I was constantly on edge and feared I was not going to make it. On the outside, you would have never guessed that this was my reality.

After the third exam, I realized I could not do this alone. Because I was afraid I would fail my classes, I reached out for help. I met with

academic advising to discuss test-taking strategies and test anxiety, received tutoring from a second-year student in anatomy and physiology, and shared my feelings and struggles with friends and family.

I successfully finished my first semester of medical school by committing myself to my classes, adopting new study strategies, and doing my best every day to take care of my mind, body, and spirit. I learned the importance of not comparing myself to others, because we all have different strengths and weaknesses, and we are all facing our own battles.

I realized that the most I can ask of myself is my best effort, and that will always be good enough. I took breaks throughout the day, learned how to study more efficiently, and began enjoying life outside of studying again.

You are not weak if you ask for help. In fact, you are extremely strong, because you are rebelling against the stigma and judgment that still exist surrounding mental health in our society today—stigmas that especially affect physicians. However, we must be brave enough to speak up about our struggles—not only to protect ourselves, but also our patients, their families, and the future generation of doctors.

By neglecting our own health, we may not be giving our patients the compassion, attention, and treatment they deserve. Ultimately, mistakes could be made that put their lives at risk. Normalize seeking tutoring or therapy, taking a semester off, and anything else that prioritizes your well-being. At the end of the day, your life will always be more important than any exam score.

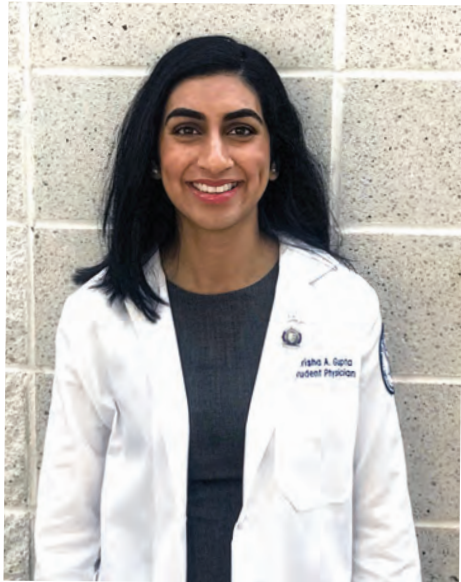
Medical school is not easy. While some students excel from day one and are skillful exam takers, I was not one of them, and I am not afraid to admit it. I am very grateful I received the support and tutoring I needed.

I share my story in an effort to help others with similar experiences feel less alone and to tear down the expectations that medical students and doctors must be extremely strong, resilient people without mental struggles of their own. It is okay to ask for help.

*Rachel Pray is a first-year KPCOM student.*

# When the Patient Becomes the Doctor

BY KRISHA A. GUPTA



Imagine sitting down to learn a clinical case after taking two exams on a Friday afternoon. All you are looking forward to is having a nice weekend off after studying for weeks. And then, the professor starts telling you every single thing that could possibly go wrong in your life.

He isn't talking to any of the other 50 people sitting in that classroom with you. He is talking directly to you. Saying you are going to have your foot amputated, and your baby might have birth defects, and your kidneys could fail, and you may have a very hard, miserable life.

That's what happened to me. Except the professor didn't know he was singling me out. He was talking in general about patients with type 1 diabetes. But I was sitting there camouflaged among the other future doctors. Me, a patient with type 1 diabetes.

I've had type 1 diabetes for seven years, so maybe you think I'd be used to it. But when we learn about diabetes complications in class, it takes me right back to the patient exam room, except the way the words are delivered is matter-of-fact, with nothing to soften the blow.

I can't count the times the word diabetes has come up in lectures. You might think that after the endocrine block was finished, I was safe. But every few weeks, we stumble upon a different complication. It is easier to sweep the complications under the rug as assumed type 2 issues when the doctor doesn't specify a type of diabetes. But every so often, the professor will explicitly mention type 1 diabetes, and that isn't just a dagger to the heart—it's a twist of the knife as well.

It is hard enough to be your own pancreas, to try and account for every fluctuation in blood sugar manually, without the weight of all the complications that can occur if you aren't doing a perfect job. But sometimes, going to class brings the burden to the surface.

It's like a line is cast that reels in a complication of diabetes I pushed to the far depths of my mind. Then the professor reads it aloud in class and elaborates on it. Sometimes, the professor even goes into excruciating detail. And then I have to study it, because it could be on my exam.

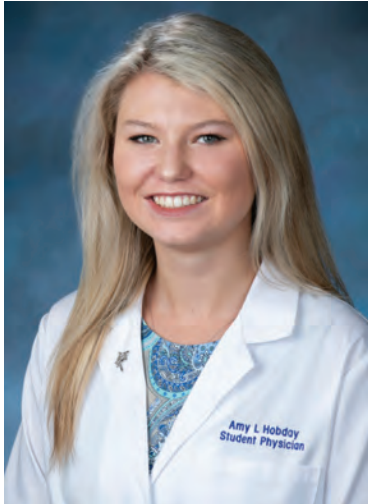
So, how do I stay mentally healthy while going through medical school? I talk to my friends who have type 1 diabetes. I spend time at a diabetes camp, and I do research about the disease. But what helps my mental health the most is sharing information about type 1 diabetes with others.

Educating people about type 1 diabetes might seem like it's about serving others, but a lot of it is about helping myself. Being uniquely able to make the world a better place for people with type 1 diabetes takes something that is such a burden in my own life and turns it into something useful. It turns it into something important.

*Krishna A. Gupta is a second-year KPCOM student.*

# I Am You

BY AMY HOBDDAY



I was 22 years old when I started medical school. Many people described me as a type A perfectionist. At the same time, I was constantly driven to help those in need, putting others ahead of myself. These characteristics, and the overwhelming desire to help others, are what drew me to medicine.

Embarking on this journey was no easy task. There were daily tsunamis of emotions, constant racing thoughts, and continuous worry, all of which were commonplace to me. I learned how to diagnose nephrolithiasis, read an ECG, and differentiate between diabetes mellitus and insipidus. Out of the wealth of material presented, the subject that stood out the most was psychology.

During this course, I was taught what it looked like to have mental health issues, what predisposes individuals to anxiety, and the mnemonic for depression, but something was missing: What about individuals who are high-functioning?

High-functioning people with mental health issues are people I like to call professional maskers. They have become so accustomed to how they feel that they have convinced themselves that their symptoms are normal. These maskers suppress their symptoms into socially acceptable characteristics. As a result, others never perceive them as sick.

These are the individuals with anxiety disorders who are perceived as perfectionists, striving to help others, but never asking for help. They have conditioned themselves to believe that the constant worry is a normal aspect of life. I recently read about a patient who felt numb after taking newly prescribed anxiety medication. The doctor's reaction? "Oh good, it's working."

This patient's experience of normal emotions felt so foreign, she felt numb. If people have convinced themselves that they're not sick, how is anyone else supposed to make a diagnosis? Reflecting on this led me to the realization that these characteristics describe many physicians.

Medical professionals have a particularly high suicide rate due to the nature of their career path. They are taught to diagnose, to treat and to discuss issues with their patients, but they are rarely asked to do the same for themselves. These are people who dedicate their lives to helping others, but don't realize the help they need. It raises the question: Does their career path predispose

them to mental health disorders, or do their mental health disorders drive their career path?

Physicians are skilled at diagnosing others, but often, they are not skilled at realizing how much they are struggling on the inside. Improving awareness and support for these individuals, these professional maskers, within the medical community requires an emphasis on understanding how it truly feels to have mental health issues rather than how it appears from the outside.

They need help to realize that their racing thoughts, overwhelming emotions, and endless worry are not typical mental states. Just as they see patients, they, too, need to be seen.

I was 22 years old when I was diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder.

I hear you. I see you. I am you.

*Amy Hobdday is a second-year KPCOM student.*





# The Art of Healing with Acrylics

BY VANIA ARBOLEDA



I have spent 11 to 12 months of the year living in the United States since 2013. Thus, many would assume I feel entirely at home here because I have been in this country for eight years. But the truth is that this past year has reminded me that I am still a tourist in this country.

During this pandemic, and as a holder of a student visa, I have been afraid to go home and not be able to return to my life here. The world has turned upside down, closing and opening its international borders from one day to the next. Due to these unpredictable travel restrictions, I have not traveled to Peru in two years.

Even though my life is in Davie, Florida, I miss Peru dearly. As an international student, my home, family,

and friends are in a small town in Peru called Chiclayo. Consequently, returning home has always been a healthy reminder of my childhood roots, who I am, and what I can become.

The pandemic exacerbated many stressors and took away much of the joy of starting my medical school career in 2020. Being away from home, from that support system, has been difficult. What do medical students do to prevent burnout, emerge from depression, and remain focused?

After participating in one of the college's first-year wellness sessions, I learned that many of my classmates answered this question by doing various forms of exercise. I enjoy sports, so I tried going back to playing basketball, but I ended up injuring myself after the first game. So, I turned to my old friend, acrylics.

Painting has always been a cathartic process for me. I started painting in 2015 when my mother was diagnosed with cancer. I stopped when she passed away and returned to it last year. Surprisingly, even after the three-year break, painting still feels like the most liberating practice for my stressors.

*Vania Arboleda is a first-year KPCOM student.*







1



2



3

Arboleda shares insights about her artwork featured on this page.

1. **Chief Complaint** (top left) “showcases my emotions going into my first clinical skills exam with my standardized patient.”
2. **Above Water** (above) summarizes her first year in medical school, “including things I have changed and people I had to let go.”
3. **Second Wave** (bottom left) “represents the disappointment of once more going into quarantine.”





# GRADUATION 2021 AND SENIOR AWARDS

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most Senior Week activities, including the Senior Awards Dinner Dance and the military commissioning ceremony, were either canceled or held virtually. However, unlike in 2020, when the Health Professions Division Commencement Ceremony was held virtually, an in-person, socially distanced event was held outdoors on May 18 at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida.

During the 2020–2021 academic year, 236 Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, 74 Master of Public Health, 56 Master of Science in Family Therapy, 23 Bachelor of Science in Public Health, 20 Master of Science in Biomedical Informatics, 16 Master of Science in Nutrition, 16 Bachelor of Science in Public Health (minor), 11 Doctor of Philosophy in Family Therapy, 9 Master of Science in Disaster and Emergency Management, 8 Doctor of Marriage and Family Therapy, and 5 Master of Science in Medical Education degrees were conferred.

During the ceremony, graduates were acknowledged for their accomplishments in front of a limited audience of family, friends, and faculty members. Jared Moskowitz, J.D., former director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, delivered the keynote address and received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.





**CHANCELLOR'S AWARD (OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE)**  
Regina Zambrano, D.O.

**DEAN'S AWARD (OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE)**  
Maria Herrera, D.O.

**RESEARCH AWARD (OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE)**  
Milad Heydari-Kamjani, D.O.

**GOLDEN APPLE AWARD (OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE)**  
Caitlin Arbos, M.S.

**CHANCELLOR'S AWARD (MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH)**  
Jackie Pho, M.P.H.

**DEAN'S AWARD (MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH)**  
Rajani Karki, M.P.H.

**RESEARCH AWARD (MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH)**  
Maximiliano Cedeno Hahn, M.P.H.

**SERVICE AWARD (MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH)**  
Misha Brahmhatt, M.P.H.

**GOLDEN APPLE AWARD (MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH)**  
T. Lucas Hollar, Ph.D.

**ROSEBUD FOSTER AWARD  
(MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH)**  
Ujwal Vinubhai Patel, M.P.H.

**CHANCELLOR'S AWARD (BIOMEDICAL INFORMATICS)**  
Stephen E. Bronsburg, Ph.D., M.H.S.A., M.S.

**DEAN'S AWARD (BIOMEDICAL INFORMATICS)**  
Jodi Arce, M.S.

**RESEARCH AWARD (BIOMEDICAL INFORMATICS)**  
Mirza Baig, M.S.

**SERVICE AWARD (BIOMEDICAL INFORMATICS)**  
Ana Castilla, M.S.

**GOLDEN APPLE AWARD (BIOMEDICAL INFORMATICS)**  
Robin Jacobs, Ph.D., M.S.W., M.S., M.P.H.

**CHANCELLOR'S AWARD (DISASTER AND  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT)**  
Dana McGeehan, M.S.

**DEAN'S AWARD (DISASTER AND  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT)**  
Bethany Shaw, M.S.

**SERVICE AWARD (DISASTER AND  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT)**  
Wilson Sainvil, M.S.

**DEAN'S AWARD (MEDICAL EDUCATION)**  
Shannon Lane, M.S.

**CHANCELLOR'S AWARD (NUTRITION PROGRAM)**  
Jessie Brownstein, M.S.

**DEAN'S AWARD (NUTRITION PROGRAM)**  
Ashley Ring, M.S.



# GRADUATION 2021 AND SENIOR AWARDS



## RESEARCH AWARD (NUTRITION PROGRAM)

Angel Marquez, D.O., M.S.

## SERVICE AWARD (NUTRITION PROGRAM)

Cassandra Evans, M.S.

## OUTSTANDING STUDENT DIETITIAN AWARD (NUTRITION PROGRAM)

Katie Emerson, M.S.

## GOLDEN APPLE AWARD (NUTRITION PROGRAM)

Stephanie Petrosky, M.H.A.

## CHANCELLOR'S AWARD (COUPLE AND FAMILY THERAPY MASTER'S)

Desiree Barrionuevo, M.S.

## DEAN'S AWARD (COUPLE AND FAMILY THERAPY MASTER'S)

Javonna Arriaga, M.S.

## CHANCELLOR'S AWARD (COUPLE AND FAMILY THERAPY DOCTORATE)

Fonda Mosal, D.M.F.T.

## DEAN'S AWARD (COUPLE AND FAMILY THERAPY DOCTORATE)

Robin Akdendiz, Ph.D.

## A. ALVIN GREBER, D.O., CARDIOLOGY AWARD

Karla Breton, D.O.

## ALBERT L. WEINER, D.O., MEMORIAL PSYCHIATRY AWARD

Gil Menashe, D.O.

## ALUMNI ASSOCIATION AWARD

Kayla Brown, D.O.

## AMERICAN CONGRESS OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNCOLOGISTS (ACOG) DISTRICT XII DANIEL R. BARKUS OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE STUDY OF OB-GYN

Sofia Sarduy, D.O.

## AMERICAN CONGRESS OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNCOLOGISTS (ACOG) DISTRICT XII OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE SERVICE OF OB-GYN

Hayley Wernon, D.O.

## CLINICAL SERVICE AWARD

Maria Herrera, D.O.

## DEAN'S COMMUNITY AWARD

Tiana Dodd, D.O.

## DEAN'S GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY AWARD

Regina Zambrano, D.O.

## DEAN'S ORGANIZATIONAL AWARD

Michael Goldstein, D.O.

## DONNA JONES MORITSUGU AWARD

Allison Richards (wife of Chad Richards)

## ENDOCRINE SOCIETY AWARD

Zachary Burns, D.O.







**GRADUATION 2021**  
AND SENIOR AWARDS





**EXCELLENCE IN EMERGENCY MEDICINE AWARD**

Lorena Rodriguez Perez, D.O.

**FLORIDA CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS, LUTHER W. HOLLOWAY AWARD**

Maria Arrate, D.O.

**FLORIDA CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF OSTEOPATHY AWARD IN OSTEOPATHIC MANIPULATIVE MEDICINE**

Gabrielle McDermott, D.O.

**LEONARD TOW HUMANISM IN MEDICINE AWARDS**

Student Recipient: Maria Arrate, D.O.

Faculty Recipient: James Howell, D.O.

**MATTHEW A. TERRY, D.O., MEMORIAL AWARD**

Kayla Brown, D.O.

**MERCK MANUAL AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING GRADUATING MEDICAL STUDENTS**

Issam Beydoun, D.O.

Vladimir Faustin, D.O.

Gabrielle Houser, D.O.

Jessica Jean-Baptiste, D.O.

Alexa Peterson, D.O.

**MORTON AND GERALDINE TERRY INTERNAL MEDICINE AWARD**

Krunal Patel, D.O.

**MORTON AND MARY SMITH ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

Aakash Trivedi, D.O.

**OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN GERIATRICS AWARD**

Alyssa Melo, D.O.

**OUTSTANDING STUDENT IN THE STUDY OF PEDIATRICS**

Cassandra Weaver, D.O.

**OUTSTANDING STUDENT IN PEDIATRIC SERVICE**

Taylor Kolb, D.O.

**PREDOCTORAL OSTEOPATHIC PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE FELLOWSHIP CERTIFICATES**

Michael Goldstein, D.O.

Robin Mata, D.O.

Gabrielle McDermott, D.O.

Sara Rodriguez, D.O.

Gabriela Teixeira-Bell, D.O.

Nicholas Wawrzyniak, D.O.

**PREDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP AWARD**

Aaron Hacker, D.O.

Milad Heydari-Kamjani, D.O.

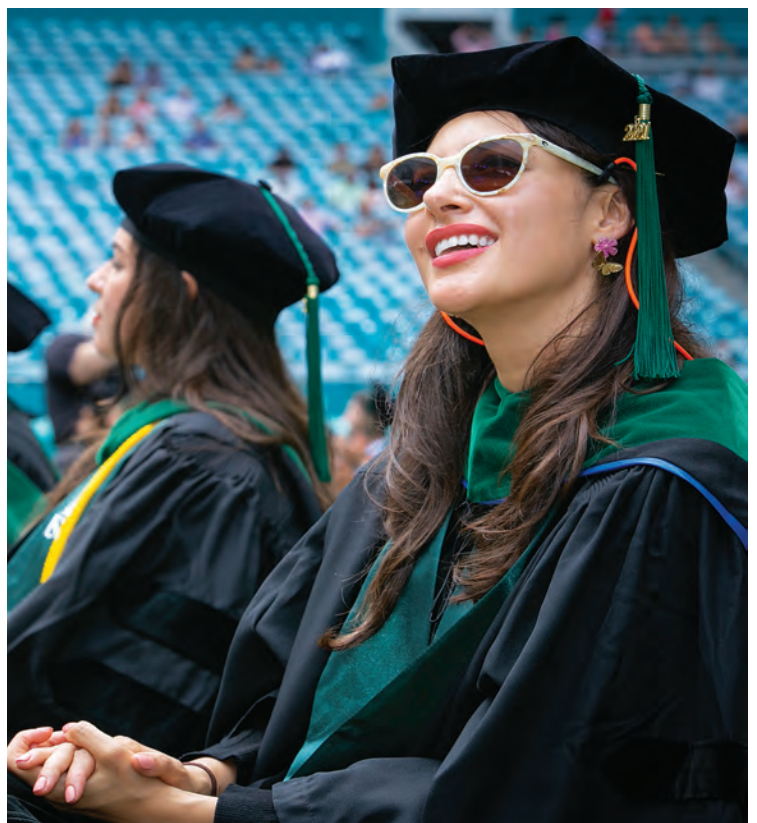
**ROSE COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD**

Eduardo Diaz, D.O.

Gabriela Teixeira-Bell, D.O.

**SAMUEL J. SALMAN, D.O., AWARD IN FAMILY MEDICINE**

Kelly Le, D.O.



# Kindred Connection

## KPCOM FRIENDSHIP FLOWERS INTO LOVE

BY SCOTT COLTON, B.A., APR

Their recollections of when they first laid eyes on each other may differ, but that's about the only discordant detail shared by class of 2021 graduate Rachael Candela, D.O., and class of 2020 alumnus Derek Casey, D.O., who met and fell in love while doing their clinical rotations at Nova Southeastern University's (NSU's) Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine (KPCOM).

### Friends First

Although they officially met at Broward General Medical Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Casey recalled Candela making an immediate impact on him during a student meeting at the Fort Lauderdale/Davie Campus. "My first memory of Rachael was when she introduced herself as the incoming president of the KPCOM's Geriatrics Club," he said. "We didn't introduce ourselves to each other, but Rachael had to say a few words to the group. I instantly felt drawn to her, her shyness but willingness to be a leader, and her smile. I thought she was adorable."

Candela's initial interaction with Casey at Broward General Medical Center in the summer of 2019 was pleasant but didn't set her heart racing or her mind conjuring thoughts of matrimony. "It was the first rotation of my third year, and I was with another third-year student waiting for the internal medicine residents to meet us. We were sitting at a table, and in walks Derek," she recalled. "He introduced himself as a fourth-year student who would be rotating with us that month. I remember initially feeling intimidated having him there and knowing he knew a lot more than I did, but the three of us bonded quickly."

During the next few months, as the pair spent more time together, a true friendship blossomed. Casey, however, yearned for more. "We started off being good friends and fellow students on our clinical rotations. Rachael was actually in a relationship at the time, so I knew she was off limits," he explained. "I was drawn to her and really enjoyed spending time together at the



hospital, but I obviously couldn't ask her out. Finally, about six months into our friendship, she became single. I wanted to be there to support her as a friend, but I really liked her."

According to Candela, she initially resisted Casey's overtures to go on an actual date for fear of ruining their friendship. "I really liked being his friend and didn't want to lose that," she said. "But I finally agreed to go to a Florida Panthers hockey game with him, and he ended up kissing me at the end of the date. After that, we were inseparable."

### Rooftop Revelation

By the time Casey graduated from the college in May 2020, the couple had fallen deeply in love. Fortunately, their burgeoning relationship was able to flourish, as Casey launched his internal medicine residency training at Broward Health Medical Center while Candela completed her fourth year at NSU's KPCOM, which allowed them to remain geographically intact.

In March, after Candela successfully matched into the family residency program of her choice at Floyd





Casey proposes to Candela atop a rooftop restaurant in New York.

Medical Center in Rome, Georgia, the couple and several friends decided to celebrate by taking a trip to New York. “I knew I wanted to ask Rachael to marry me before she started the hustle and bustle of residency. I was in the process of buying the perfect ring and thinking of the perfect place to propose when one of Rachael’s friends suggested we go to New York to celebrate the residency match,” Casey explained.

“I knew that New York would be the ideal place to propose,” he added. “Rachael sent me suggestions of places to eat and visit while in New York, and she mentioned this cute rooftop restaurant where you can rent your own ‘igloo.’ It took a lot of coordinating with Rachael’s friends and a few fibs to throw Rachael off my trail.”

Not surprisingly, Candela had an inkling a proposal might be in the offing when they went to New York. “I had a slight suspicion that maybe I would be proposed to on the trip,” she admitted. “But after going to a fancy dinner to celebrate me matching into the residency program I wanted—with no engagement ring pulled out during it—I assumed I was wrong.”

Casey’s subterfuge had worked. The next day, after visiting the Statue of Liberty, the duo had lunch with their friends at a rooftop restaurant called The Greens. “Assuming my friend had made these plans, I had no idea that when we went to take pictures of the city view, it was a setup to capture the moment of Derek’s proposal. I’m usually good at figuring out surprises, but I had no idea. It was perfect.”

## Future in Focus

Although they will be spending the next few years apart as they complete their residency programs in different states, they’re already doing preliminary planning for their wedding, which is scheduled to occur at some point in 2022. “I am sad to be away from Derek for two years while he finishes up in Florida, but I am so lucky to have a significant other who understands and supports my career choices,” Candela said.

Candela and Casey, who love animals and are interested in pursuing careers in both inpatient and outpatient primary care when they complete their residency training, are aware of how fortunate they are to have each other to love and lean on in the months and years ahead. “Because of our relationship, I think the biggest change in my life is the improvement in my mental health,” Candela revealed. “Our career path creates so much stress, so having someone who listens to you vent and helps you relax is more than I could ask for.”

“A big part of why our relationship works so well is because we enjoy a lot of the same hobbies. We have become scuba certified, gotten into rock climbing, hiked mountains, and binged countless television series together,” Casey explained. “Being adventurous and enjoying our time together has paved a lot of the changes in our lives. I think the most profound change in my life is knowing what my future holds. Finding someone who has the same ideals and prospects has allowed me to simply be happy in the present and not stress so much about the unknowns of the future.” □



The KPCOM couple at Broward General Medical Center, which is where Casey first caught Candela’s attention.

# Heartfelt Care

## FROM HUMBLING ORDEALS TO A LEGACY OF HEALING

BY SCOTT COLTON, B.A., APR

*“Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile.”*

—Albert Einstein

As a child growing up in Iran, Kayvan Amini, D.O., FACC, and his four brothers were surrounded by a loving family that appreciated education and public service and instilled those values into them at a young age.

“My father held prominent positions in government, and my mother exemplified compassion and service to the community,” said Amini, a 2001 Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine (KPCOM) alumnus. “My family’s contributions over decades even earned my grandmother the prestigious National Mother of the Year award from the king and queen of Iran. My family members were role models who helped me realize the ideals of value beyond self.”

### Coming to America

The family’s strength was severely tested in 1979, when the Islamic Revolution led to the overthrow of the shah of Iran in 1979, forcing the family to ultimately flee to the United States. Amini, who was just a child when the overthrow occurred, recalled the events with chilling clarity.

“We immigrated to America like many before us with no more than the clothes on our back. Our escape to freedom was filled with the horrors of being shot at, bombed, chased by wolves, buried partially underground to avoid freezing temperatures, starvation, and other encounters that left us wondering if all would be lost,” he admitted. “However, our persistence and hope for a better future remained and saw us through.”







From left: Pictured in front of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California, are wife Sahar, son Armin, Kayvan, mom Parvin, and dad Ali.

Through this experience, I realized that, together with my family, we have the strength and capacity to overcome the worst of circumstances in life.”

Once they arrived in the United States, Amini and his family were “very grateful for the incredible opportunities this country and the many people we encountered provided us,” he said. “It made it clear that my lifelong pursuits would have to embody the public service and compassion ingrained in us by my family, with the mission to give back to my adopted country at the highest levels.”

Over time, Amini determined that a medical career was where his destiny lay. “After numerous experiences, guidance from caring mentors, and especially through my collegiate studies, I found myself

drawn to health care,” he explained. “The totality of my life experiences culminated in my following a path to be a physician and to practice a fully individualized approach to treating patients that incorporates humanity, humility, understanding, compassion, and education, which enables people to be at their best and become their own physicians.”

### **Osteopathic Appeal**

After earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry from the University of Miami and completing a year of study in the university’s Ph.D. chemistry program, Amini was ready to pursue his medical school education. “I was fortunate that my first introduction to osteopathic medicine came from a trusted source, my brother Aryia, who during his dental medicine

training in Philadelphia had worked with D.O.s and thought highly of them,” Amini explained.

“I made several visits to Nova Southeastern University (NSU) and the KPCOM, which made it very clear to me that the college was poised for the future of health care,” he added. “It embodied the right elements for producing the best physicians, was student-centric, and had a family atmosphere unlike any other opportunity I had looked into.”

When he became a KPCOM student, his goal was to receive an education that would allow him to become a physician who could help his patients “be at their best mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually so they can give back their best to their loved ones. This privilege was given to me by the college and all the amazing

people there who invested in my journey,” he said.

As he progressed through his KPCOM education, Amini began to weigh his options regarding what specialty he might pursue once he graduated. While doing his third-year clinical rotations, he zeroed in on his choice—cardiology and cardiovascular disease.

## Cardiology Connection

“I developed a desire to pursue the field’s vast knowledge, which is rooted in clinical trials, research, and advanced technology,” said Amini, who completed his cardiovascular disease postgraduate training at Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach, Florida. “It was a field that offered a comprehensive way to manage, diagnose, and treat patients by having the capacity to use primary care and specialty expertise. It’s also a specialty where life and death are only one heartbeat apart.”

Because Amini knew exactly the type of medical practice he wanted to be involved in, he established South Florida Cardiology Consultants in Pembroke Pines, Florida,

in 2007, serving as president and CEO. “I have been fortunate enough not just to practice medicine in our amazing community, but to own and or manage multiple medical practices. This has enabled me to shape the vision and dynamics of the ‘family’ style care I want to deliver to my patients, while having the ability to rapidly implement valuable components of staffing, testing, and technology to optimize the care of my patients and community without any compromise,” he explained.

“Central to my practice is honesty, compassion, empathy, selflessness, education, and the integration of a team approach to provide health care services to our community,” he added. “A few years ago, I discovered a need to provide services to an underinsured and compromised community of patients in Broward County. As a result, I created Elite Cardiology LLC, an organization of multiple cardiology practices that synergistically care for cardiovascular issues and the needs of thousands of patients in our community through joint ventures with local hospital systems.”

## Ardent Advocate

In addition to being a compassionate healer, Amini is an engaged osteopathic leader on the local and statewide level. Whether it’s serving as current president of the Broward County Osteopathic Medical Association (BCOMA) or in board roles with the Florida Osteopathic Medical Association and the Broward Medical Association, Amini believes it’s his responsibility to make positive contributions whenever possible and stay engaged in shaping the future of health care.

“I have been fortunate enough to have the opportunities to be at the forefront of the direction of our health care profession and community services,” said Amini, who is a fellow of the American College of Cardiology and has been a member of the Memorial Healthcare System Executive Committee. “This privilege has allowed me to fight for our shared better tomorrow. With the challenges the past year has brought the health care community, I wanted the focus of the BCOMA to be on the future of our profession—our student physicians.”

Under his leadership, multiple campaigns were designed using virtual forums to address the needs the COVID-19 pandemic created for KPCOM students. He also worked closely with the BCOMA Mentors Program to create opportunities for KPCOM students to have direct mentorship and interaction with a number of Florida’s osteopathic leaders to help shape the students’ personal goals, ambitions, and engagement in the profession.

Amini also partnered with the Miami Rescue Mission, which addresses the needs of



Frederick Lippman and Kayvan Amini





Clockwise from top left: Sahar, Kayvan, Armin, and Ariana Amini

homeless people in Broward and Miami-Dade counties, to serve as a medical consultant for the iHeart-Radio shows *Mission Possible* and *Life Changers*. The goal is to educate thousands of listeners and empower them from a wellness standpoint. “We have much work left to do, but together, with the support of various people and organizations, the future is exciting and filled with opportunity,” he stressed.

### Family Man

Although Amini’s professional endeavors bring him much contentment, it’s his close bond with his family that truly nourishes his soul. Amini is especially grateful for his relationship with his wife Sahar Sarrami Amini, D.O., a 2012

KPCOM alumna who serves as assistant professor and vice chair of the college’s Department of Internal Medicine.

“There are times in life that make us really self-reflect and see the magic and beauty of our world,” said Amini, who is also the proud dad of three-year-old son Armin and newborn daughter Ariana. “After an introduction by mutual friends, I immediately realized that Sahar was my fate, and that dreams do come true. I found a best friend, a lifelong partner, and my greatest wish come true.”

Being married to someone who works in the same profession can sometimes present challenges, but Amini has only positive things to say about their merger of marriage and medicine. “I am fortunate to

be married to my best friend,” he said. “Sharing the same profession and viewpoints, as well as both being KPCOM alumni, only helps us be better support structures for each other.”

### Shark Pride

Amini, who serves as a KPCOM clinical assistant professor, takes great pleasure in being an NSU alumnus. He takes even greater pride in the fact that familial affiliations with NSU are becoming more of a tradition as the years pass.

“Being an NSU Shark means more than just attending an institution; it’s a circle of life and family,” Amini emphasized. “Consequently, after I went into private practice, I became involved as a volunteer faculty member and continued the education continuum for our future professionals and leaders. Soon after I married Sahar, my brother Aryia joined the faculty at the NSU College of Dental Medicine, and I am proud to say that our next generation—my nephew Daran—will be joining us to begin his journey to become a physician at NSU’s KPCOM.”

“I take great pride in the knowledge that Dr. Kayvan Amini is an alumnus of the NSU Health Professions Division,” said Frederick Lippman, R.Ph., Ed.D., the division’s longtime chancellor. “He is a preeminent cardiologist and internal medicine physician who is highly respected by his peers in the Memorial Healthcare System. He is a leader amongst the physician community and epitomizes the very best of what an NSU education has to offer.” □

**Muneer A. Ali**, D.O. ('10), associate medical director and a child, adolescent, and adult psychiatrist at Amen Clinics, Inc. in Atlanta, Georgia, joined the Ehave, Inc. Medical Advisory Board. In this role, he collaborates with other members of the board to assist and advise the company on human trials for its cognitive and psychedelic opportunities, as well as assist and advise on mental health analytical platforms.



**David Chitty**, D.O. ('15), completed his Zucker School of Medicine medical oncology/hematology fellowship program at Hofstra/Northwell Health in Long Island, New York. Chitty, the recipient of the

2021 Clinical Excellence Award from the Northwell Health Cancer Institute, recently accepted a position as an attending physician specializing in hematologic cancers at the Monter Cancer Center/Northwell Health Cancer Institute in New York.



**Tyler Cymet**, D.O., FACP, FACOFP ('88), appeared as a featured expert on several episodes of the Discovery+ TV program *Nostradamus: End of Days*, where he explained the physiology behind what

happens to people in catastrophes. He also published an article on vaccine hesitancy with a group of international educators titled "Opposing Vaccine Hesitancy During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Critical Commentary and United Statement of an International Osteopathic Research Community" on the Europe PMC website.



**Linda Delo**, D.O., FACOFP ('86), received the Physician of the Year Award during the virtual Florida Osteopathic Medical Association Convention held February 19–21. The award is presented to an osteopathic

physician who, during the past year, has made significant and considerable contributions to the osteopathic profession, his or her patients, and to the community both locally and statewide.



**Alan George**, D.O. ('10), finished his U.S. Army active duty service commitment last year and completed his gastrointestinal and hepatic pathology fellowship training at the University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Hospital on June 30.



**Kristopher Sean Goddard**, D.O. ('08), a regenerative medicine specialist, is the founder of the Osteopathic Center, which has offices in Jupiter and Miami, Florida, and Knoxville, Tennessee. He

strives to provide his patients with exceptional care in integrative medicine and osteopathic manipulative medicine by incorporating training from traditional medicine, acupuncture, and alternative medicine.



**Lisa Gwynn**, D.O., M.B.A., FAAP, CPE ('98), was promoted to interim division chief of child and adolescent health at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine in Miami, Florida.





**Eric Handler, D.O.,** FACEP ('01), was named chair of emergency services at Saint Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston, New Jersey. Handler, who is board certified in emergency medicine, previously served

as Saint Barnabas's medical director of the Rapid Diagnostic Unit and as medical director of operations.



**Marlow B. Hernandez, D.O., M.P.H.,** M.B.A., FACP ('11), founder and chief executive officer of Cano Health, will also serve as chair of its board of directors. Cano Health has grown to more than 70

medical centers across Florida, Texas, and Nevada that serve more than 100,000 managed care patients.



**Christopher Hogg, D.O. ('00),** joined the medical staff at ProMedica Coldwater Regional Hospital in Coldwater, Michigan, where he will offer orthopedic services for pediatric, adolescent, adult, and geriatric patients.



**Jeena Kar, D.O. ('20),** was appointed as one of three national resident delegates on behalf of the American Psychiatric Association to represent the field of psychiatry within the American Medical Association (AMA).

During her two-year term, Kar will help write and evaluate AMA resolutions and policy.



**Jason A. Levy, D.O.,** M.S. ('16), was awarded the American College of Osteopathic Surgeons Resident Achievement Award in his final year as a urologic surgery resident at Main Line Health in Pennsylvania.

He is in the midst of completing his fellowship and began serving as a clinical instructor at the James Buchanan Brady Urological Institute at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, in July.

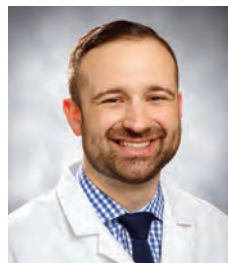


**Gee Yoon Suzie Park, D.O., ('19),** was elected president of the Emergency Medicine Residents Association of Michigan, which represents residents across 26 programs in Michigan. Additionally, Park was

inducted as a Michigan College of Emergency Physicians board member in July and received the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) Leadership and Advocacy Conference Scholarship to attend the July ACEP symposium in Washington, D.C.



**Ravin Patel, D.O. ('20),** a family medicine resident at Inspira Health Network in Vineland, New Jersey, was 1 of 12 residents selected to serve on the American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians Resident Council.



**Ian D. Singer, D.O., J.D. ('19),** a third-year family medicine resident at Broward Health in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, was named a fellow of the American College of Legal Medicine. Fellow status eligibility includes a health science degree, a law degree, and state licensure.

*(continued on page 54)*



**Zachary Skurski**, D.O. ('15), a board-certified ophthalmologist who serves as a major in the U.S. Army, is director of the West Point Refractive Surgery Program and ophthalmology service chief at the U.S. Military

Academy at West Point in New York. He is also an assistant professor of surgery at the F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland.



**Jodi Wallis**, D.O. ('05), who is board certified in obstetrics and gynecology, joined the St. Joseph's Health Primary Care Center in Syracuse, New York. Prior to joining St. Joseph's Health, she held clinical, teaching,

and administrative positions at Upstate University Hospital in Syracuse.



**Candace White-Jackson**, D.O., M.P.H., M.S. ('12), is the new CVS Health MinuteClinic medical director in the Atlanta Metro and surrounding area of Georgia.



**Jason A. Zell**, D.O., M.P.H. ('01), is the new vice chief for academic affairs in the Division of Hematology/Oncology at the University of California, Irvine School of Medicine. As vice chief, he is involved with all recruitment

efforts and academic actions, such as promotions, within a division comprising 40 faculty members. He will continue to serve as program director for the Hematology/Oncology Fellowship Training Program—a position he has held since 2012.

## Alumni Duo Appointed to Board of Osteopathic Medicine



**Tiffany Sizemore**, D.O., FACC, FACOI ('09) and **William Kirsh**, D.O., M.P.H. ('85), were appointed to the Florida Board of Osteopathic Medicine by Governor Ron DeSantis. Board members play a leading role in the ever-changing health care environment through dialogue with the public, the legislature, academia, and the community. The board consists of seven members appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Florida Senate.

## REMEMBERING 1989 ALUMNUS GARY COHEN, D.O.



On the morning of June 24, the world watched in horror as a portion of the 12-story Champlain Towers South building in Surfside, Florida, collapsed, claiming numerous lives,

including class of 1989 alumnus Gary Cohen, D.O., whose body was recovered from the rubble and identified two weeks later.

Cohen, who was a respected physician at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center in Alabama, was in an 11th-floor condo in the Champlain Towers South building when the collapse occurred. He had come to South Florida to visit his terminally ill father and was staying with his brother Brad Cohen, M.D., who also perished.



# MATCH THE ALUMNI FEATURE



1. a Big Apple COVID-19 physician volunteer
2. a *Grey's Anatomy* consultant/D.O. advocate
3. a COVID-19 clinical trials leader
4. a cardiologist in a family of KPCOM Sharks
5. a multifaceted otolaryngologist who believes in serving others
6. a locum tenens physician involved in wildfire relief efforts

- A. Carisa Champion, D.O., J.D., M.P.H. ('16)
- B. Brett Scotch, D.O., FAOCO ('99)
- C. Peter Andrade, D.O. ('09)
- D. Bruce G. Rankin, D.O. ('85)
- E. Terry Moy-Brown, D.O., M.P.H. ('09)
- F. Kayan Amini, D.O., FACC ('01)

## ANSWER THE KPCOM CASTING CALL!

### LET US FEATURE **YOUR** STORY!

Since it accepted its first class in 1981, the KPCOM has graduated thousands of physicians who are making significant contributions to health care and humanity on many levels.

If you would like to share an interesting story about your life or career and be profiled in *COM Outlook*, please contact Scott Colton, director of medical communications and special projects, at [scottc@nova.edu](mailto:scottc@nova.edu).

## COM Outlook Wins Two AACOM Awards



In April, the college's *COM Outlook* magazine received significant recognition in the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) Excellence in Communications (EIC) Awards Program. The magazine earned the first-place prize in the best serial publication category, while the COVID-19 article "Big Apple Anguish" featured in the summer/fall 2020 issue earned third-place honors in the Best Feature Story category.

"Since the beginning of 2020, *COM Outlook* has received an amazing five regional and national awards for its sustained excellence," said Scott Colton, B.A., APR, director of medical communications and special projects for NSU's Office of Printing and Publications. "It takes a team effort to create each issue of *COM Outlook*, so it's incredibly gratifying to see the magazine earn such significant industry recognition."

AACOM's EIC Awards Program is designed to recognize the important role communication plays in advancing osteopathic medical education and the profession. It also seeks to inspire higher levels of performance among its members. □

## Memorial Tree Honors Biochemistry Professor

In April, students from NSU's Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine (KPCOM) honored the memory of longtime NSU biochemistry professor Ronald E. Block, Ph.D., M.S., who passed away on March 26, by purchasing and planting an oak tree in front of the Terry Building. The tree planting was livestreamed on social

media so KPCOM students could view the event in a COVID-safe manner.

"Dr. Block was a compassionate, brilliant individual who dedicated his life to the KPCOM students," said second-year student and class of 2023 president Aneil Tawakalzada. "We are grateful for the opportunity to honor his legacy in this meaningful way."

In addition to the tree-planting ceremony, the students hosted a separate Zoom event for KPCOM students and faculty members. The event included one minute of silence to honor Block and provided opportunities for the students and faculty members to share their stories about the popular professor. "It was an incredible feeling to have our KPCOM community come together to give back to someone who influenced and inspired us all," said second-year student Harsh Patel, who was instrumental in leading the tree-planting initiative.

The students also received approval to establish an annual \$500 scholarship in Block's name. The scholarship will be available to KPCOM students and will give preference to students in need of financial assistance who demonstrate an interest in biochemistry and chemistry. □



From left: Class of 2023 board officers Aneil Tawakalzada, Harsh Patel, Heather Silverstein, Aakangsha Jain, Ruth Antony, Alexandra Gabro, and Ted Frederic pose in front of the memorial oak tree.



# RESTORING LIFE TO THOSE WHO PRESERVE LIVES

*"I was doing very well throughout my career. But when I came back from the Gulf, one of the first things that I picked up on was this horrible chronic fatigue. I couldn't explain it. ...I was told that it is in my head."  
—Jimmy Arocho, U.S. Army (Retired)*



## NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY **INSTITUTE FOR NEURO-IMMUNE MEDICINE**

NSU researchers are on the front lines, addressing health issues that have reached alarming heights since our veterans returned from the Gulf War more than 30 years ago. Led by Nancy Klimas, M.D., recognized worldwide for her expertise on Gulf War illness and other complex diseases, the institute is bridging the distance between bench-side research and bedside care.

There are an overwhelming number of people who need aid. Help NSU solve medically unexplained illnesses and develop cutting-edge treatments by pledging your support at [nova.edu/give/nim](https://nova.edu/give/nim).

[nova.edu/nim](https://nova.edu/nim) | (954) 262-2850

**NSU** Florida



## REDEFINE YOUR EDGE. Lean into a great career move.

### CONSIDER EARNING A GRADUATE DEGREE OR CERTIFICATE IN

- Public Health
- Health Informatics
- Disaster and Emergency Management
- Medical Education
- Nutrition
- Social Medicine
- Emergency Medicine
- Couple and Family Therapy
- Health and Wellness Coaching

Check out all of our bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and professional options at [osteopathic.nova.edu](https://osteopathic.nova.edu).