

HOPE & RESILIENCE



Student Spotlights:
Meet Mark Williams, MS4 and Inna Tabanskaya, MS2

Mark Williams



Mark pictured post-bike ride!

Past: Where did you grow up? Did you always know the medical field was for you?

I grew up in good old Riverside, CA – about an hour south of LA. We’re smack dab between the mountain and the ocean, which is about one hour to each. I really had no clue I’d end up in medicine. In high school I thought I was just going to surf my whole life but I think when college came around I realized I couldn’t make money just surfing and chilling. I knew I liked science and after some family life events in college I realized I wanted to do medicine!

Present: What do you do for fun? What are your hobbies?

I’m heavily invested in being outside and having a good time. Back in California that would manifest as snowboarding and surfing, but out here on Long Island it’s triathlon training, cycling being my favorite. I think with any hobby we all seek out the idea of being completely

present and in the moment. There's nothing like putting 100% of your brain power into something, especially when it's something that brings a massive smile to your face. Throwing yourself into something that's not medicine is like pressing the reset button on life for a bit – you don't have to think about the 120 UWORLD questions you have to do this weekend or the 500,000 anki cards you have because you missed a day. If you ride bikes and ever wanna ride together let me know!

Future: What are you looking forward to in the year/years to come? Do you know what specialty you want to pursue?

Definitely looking forward to a life in PM&R. Specifically, I'm pretty interested in sports medicine and really love the idea of helping patients that have interests similar to my own. No idea where I'll end up for residency but here's hoping for the best!

Any words of advice to other medical students?

Oh man.. haha I would say to not forget to smile. Medicine is an egregiously long road and sometimes we all question why we made this decision. But really I can't imagine myself doing anything else. I mean how many people get to say they got to help deliver a baby, work in an ER and see some sick surgeries all in the same year? We really get to do something invaluable to society and incredibly special so I always try to remember to smile.

Inna Tabanskaya



Inna and her husband in Iceland, enjoying traveling pre-COVID times.

Past: Where did you grow up? Did you always know the medical field was for you?

I was originally born in the USSR, and when I was 9, my family and I fled to the USA as refugees to escape religious and ethnic persecution. I then lived in Brookline and Newton, which are both suburbs of Boston.

I did not always know the medical field was for me: in undergrad, I was one of the few non-pre-med biology majors. After getting my Bachelor's, I went for a PhD in Genetics and Genomics. It was only during the last few years of graduate school that I worked closely with MD Fellows who were doing research and I realized I might be interested in the clinical aspects of medicine. Even with these realizations, it took about 5 years for me to make up my mind to change careers.

Present: What do you do for fun? What are your hobbies?

Ever since middle school, I have dealt with stress by taking walks along the closest body of water to where I live. In Stony Brook, that's the Long Island Sound. A few years ago, I started doing stand up paddleboarding, which is a bit like taking a walk through other areas on the water, so

it's very relaxing. The walks really help because I can let my mind wander a bit and then I can look at the day and my life with a new perspective.

If I really want to disconnect from work, nothing helps me as much as a very vigorous workout where the movements are constantly changing. When I was working in labs, it was a bit isolating, so I would always do group exercise classes, and I was on the Taekwondo team. Focusing on doing combinations of movements that I haven't done before really helps me to be in the moment.

Future: What are you looking forward to in the year/years to come? Do you know what specialty you want to pursue?

I am in the 3 year MD program for urology. Over the summer, I was involved in an immersion where I was in the clinic every day, but with fewer responsibilities than a full clinical rotation. I look forward to going back to the clinic. Even though I am learning a lot in preclinical classes, it is much more rewarding to be in the hospital.

As far away as it seems right now, I am looking forward to when I can explore the stony brook area more and start traveling again. And I would like to spend more time getting to know my classmates in person, even though the public health situation makes all those difficult.

Any words of advice to other medical students?

Do your best, but don't compare yourself with others. You are here to grow as a person and to become the best doctor you can be. It will differ from the best doctor that someone else will be, and there are patients out there who will need the kind of doctor that *you* will become.

My first time in grad school, I remember feeling so much pressure to figure out what I want to do when I "grow up." People's priorities change in all sorts of ways as they go through life and experience new things. You will figure out what works for you even if your options seem overwhelming right now!

Hope and Resilience

Hope and resilience are both psychological traits that one can use as protective factors when faced with challenges and significant stressors. Hope is defined as a 2-layered state of mind; one that is derived from 1) agency (goal-directed energy) and channeled through 2) pathways (planning to meet those goals). Hope is a realistic optimism for positive outcomes. Resilience is defined as the ability to adapt to and to a certain degree overcome challenges in the face of adversity, tragedy, and trauma. Resilience can be a dynamic process driven by connection to others/oneself, wellness, healthy thinking, and meaning/purpose. Research has shown that hope and resilience are traits that lead to constructive attitudes and behaviors thus correlating strongly with health, longevity, success, interpersonal satisfaction, and happiness.

In medicine, the stressors we face as healthcare professionals are particularly high. Medical students and physicians routinely face conflict, uncertainty and often failure. Thus, building resilience to be able to respond to such challenges in a healthy way is crucial to prevent burn-out and promote physical and mental wellbeing. The most prominent theme in building resilience in medical students is the use of internal resources particularly self-efficacy, ability to engage support, self-control, introspection, and tenacity in the face of challenges. Interestingly physical activity can also be employed as an external resource in this process. A longitudinal observational study at one medical school demonstrated that promotion and provision of physical activity may encourage development of resilience. Research also suggests that maintaining social connectedness and having a social framework plays a protective role as well. Saint Louis University School of Medicine combined specific resilience building and mindfulness training content to their coursework and this pilot curriculum was shown to reduce depression, anxiety and stress symptoms in students.

Studies conducted of physicians also isolate four main aspects of resilience which are attitudes and perspectives (valuing professional role, gratification from patient relationships, maintaining intellectual interest, personal reflection), work-life balance (setting professional boundaries, honoring oneself), good management styles (effective practices, adept business management) and supportive relationships.

A more comprehensive and research-based approach to build resilience is necessary in medical training and can provide both students and physicians with the tools to adapt to adversity more effectively. A formal training may be able to coach concrete skills and strategies that can be used to learn how to problem solve and form adaptive thought patterns. A psychologically fit workforce will lead to greater physician satisfaction, patient quality of care and patient outcomes.

References:

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Activity Corner!

Navigating through medical school is challenging – there is no doubt about this. There are good days, yes, but oftentimes it is the bad days that we tend to fixate on. Take a moment to reflect, especially on the bad days. How can we capture strength from these bad days? How can we cope with feelings of distress? How can we regain our composure, and take on the next day as a new one?

Below are some suggestions for reflection, and activities to develop resilience!

- 1) **Healthy Relationships and Support:** Seek support from family, friends, peers, and advisors – they may or may not be going through similar challenges, but they will be there to listen. Your struggles are valid, no matter what they are, and having a support network around you is one outlet to reflect on a bad day.
- 2) **Strong Mind, Strong Body: Yoga!** A yoga practice can help regain inner-strength, and take a step away from the burdens in our lives. That step away can help us develop a stronger mind and body connection, and find a balance in life.
- 3) **Relief Habits:** As cliché as it sounds, writing can be a cathartic process. Journal your worries and stressors of a bad day. Then, take the next step to try and understand what went wrong, and formulate a plan of action for the next day. Remember to take it one day at a time!

Resilience is certainly not an inherent trait. It's something we can all develop over time with strong practices rooted in healthy relationships and support, a strong mind and body, and personal relief habits! Everyone is different, experiences different struggles, and copes in unique ways. Find what works for you!

How is Medicine different from many other professions?

Medicine teaches us resilience.

Every day I see a new face,
A face of a person who is seemingly lost in this race.
A race in which it seems that everyone else has a perfect life,
But when you expose what's going on it's really full of strife.

Many of my friends only see others' lives through a screen.
When people talk about their life, only the perfect is seen.
But when we talk to patients, they aren't at their life's peak.
We learn from them when they don't even want to speak.

We learn that life's not the show that most people present.
We learn that there's usually something in life they resent.
We learn that each person always has their own battle.
It's just hard to see this in daily life's day prattle.

But we are privileged to be there at life's lowest low.
We are by their side as they go through life's blow.
We see true family dynamics and we see people grow.
We see resilience, after a thick, heavy snow.

~Eshani Goradia



Don't forget to check out the new mural in the Student Lounge! This beautiful piece was created by the Visual Arts in Medicine (VAIM) Club!

Feel free to reach out to our MeSH editors if you have any suggestions or pieces you want to be featured in our next newsletter!

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