



Student Spotlight

Our student spotlight for this issue of the newsletter is **Krishna Mehta**, MS4!



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

I was born in India and emigrated to New York when I was five years old. As cliché as it sounds, growing up as an immigrant was definitely a bit of a struggle. My family moved around a lot, before eventually settling down in Rego Park, Queens. By this time, however, I had attended five different elementary schools! I attended the Bronx High School of Science and subsequently pursued my bachelor's degree at Hunter College, where I was a part of the Muse Scholar Arts program.

I have been interested in medicine for as long as I can remember. When I was five years old, I had a book that asked me to draw an image of myself in the profession I would like to pursue when I was older. Looking back, I remember drawing an image of myself with a stethoscope around my neck. Over the years, several things have helped further my interest in medicine. Family illnesses, extensive time in clinics and hospitals, both as a family member and as a volunteer, and conducting research on various diseases, all solidified my desire to serve the community as a physician. I think my perspective in

medicine is a unique one, much of which I attribute to the Arts program back at Hunter College - I pursued a double major in Biology and Fine Arts. As a result of this unique combination of science and fine arts, I found myself living with a sort of dual personality in undergrad. This perspective has helped shape what I see myself doing in practice — taking a holistic view of approaching medicine. There is art in science and science in art, and it is this brilliant symbiotic relationship, rather than mutual exclusivity, that is embodied in medicine.

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

I love art! I like to do mixed media art (wheat sticks are some of the most interesting mediums I have used). I also enjoy sculpting and oil painting. Over the past few years, I have taken up photography and enjoy going on photography walks! Aside from art, I like to ice skate and swim. When I do have some free time, I love to travel as well! One of the most exciting places I have been to is the Himalayas, which is actually where I conducted my SCP research project during the summer between M1 and M2. I had the opportunity to live in the mountains and work at a community hospital. I would spend weekends going on hikes, exploring rivers, and thoroughly enjoying the scenery! Another memorable trip I had was living in Florence, Italy for an Italian Renaissance course that I took in undergrad. Hopefully when I can find the time to travel again and when the world is ready, I hope to explore more of the world's wonders!

Compassion Connection: How important is compassion, both with respect to patient care and yourself? What are some strategies you use to be compassionate towards yourself and others?

Compassion and mindfulness are extremely important with respect to both patient care and yourself. Oftentimes, society uses words like compassion and empathy interchangeably. However, it is important to remember that there does exist a distinction between the two. Compassion in its truest form is the desire to alleviate suffering. Compassion is a multistep process that begins with the awareness of another's or your own suffering, and then culminates in the desire to alleviate the suffering. Empathy is understanding emotions and perspectives of individuals. Its importance stems from the fact that it forms the foundation for your interactions and care of patients and yourself. I completed a compassion cultivation training (CCT) program taught by the Compassion Institute. It provides training for everyone, especially healthcare professionals. One of the ongoing initiatives they have created is called a Compassion Care Package for healthcare workers and frontline responders. The care package sends portable cards with quick 2-minute well-being and mindfulness practices that can be done before entering a patient room! More information can be found here: <https://www.compassioninstitute.com/healthcare/carepackage/>. It is interesting to note that research has demonstrated neurobiological evidence of compassionate training and its effects on the brain, and amygdala in particular. (If interested, here's a fascinating piece: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/05/180522170049.htm>.) Ultimately, I do think that compassion training decreases the degree of fearful response that one has,

leaving you to respond with less clouded judgement in a given situation. Some of the mixed opinions regarding compassion stems from whether it can be taught over time. In my opinion, everyone has some degree of intrinsic compassion, and training and teaching allow us to develop our toolbox over time. Compassion is the foundation that these “tools” and trainings can enhance over time.

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

I am looking forward to applying to residency in the coming year, and figuring out what kind of community I will get to be a part of! I am excited to pursue internal medicine, as it really is the perfect avenue that allows you to practice across numerous specialties and build long term relationships with patients. I think internal medicine is the right combination of all that I’m looking for in medicine - a strong clinical practice, good research opportunities, and ample teaching possibilities.

Any words of advice to other medical students?

Medical school is a long process, and it is easy to get lost in the details. Every so often, I think it’s important to take a step back and remember why we are doing what we are doing. ALSO - remember that this journey is your own, so it is important to focus on your growth and reflection rather than those of others. Each person has their own challenges and it is important for you to understand and appreciate your own unique journey.

Each phase has its own hurdles. Here are some phase specific pieces of advice:
For preclinical years, make sure to take breaks and figure out a good schedule for yourself. It is important to factor in time for yourself, and take mental breaks in order to avoid getting lost in the books. Find opportunities to interact with patients - there are tons of programs at Stony Brook to volunteer and participate in! These will help provide perspective to your journey. For clinical years: this is a tough time, especially third year. It is also the time where you can interact with others and feel a part of the patient care team. There will be good days and bad days. On bad days, remember to take a deep breath and let go. It is important to give yourself time to heal. In the moment, it might seem to be the worst situation possible, but with time, you will heal, and this is what will give you strength in the moments to come. On good days, make sure to rejoice and appreciate your own hard work and yourself, take in the gratitude and love from family, friends, and mentors. Just remember to take it one day at a time, and take a moment each day to reflect.

Health and Happiness

Compassion is a topic discussed frequently both in medicine and mainstream culture. It can be difficult to find actionable ways to bring compassion into your life. Evidence-based research on this topic has been increasing over the last decade, as it has been theorized to help with happiness and stress, among many other qualities.

A study at the University of Louisville SOM found that an elective involving mindfulness meditation and compassion training strengthened students' interpersonal connections and ability to address stressors in their lives more adeptly. Rather than stress management training alone, mindfulness skills and compassion cultivation may address empathy erosion, a multifaceted issue that can lead to burnout and subpar patient care, effectively.

Mindfulness can be an elusive topic, and means something slightly different to everyone. In general, it is being aware of the present moment while accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and sensations, rather than fighting against them or focusing too much on the future or on the past.

Increasing the practice of mindfulness, whether it be through meditation using one of many apps or online videos (I use Headspace; I've heard good things about Calm and 10 Percent happier as well), mindful exercise, or even being present during simple tasks such as brushing your teeth or showering, can be beneficial in a number of ways. Attached below are some links that may be helpful for those who want to start practicing mindfulness.

Helpful links:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6511143/>

<https://www.mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started/>

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/317986#Mindfulness-on-the-go>



Activity Corner: JUST LIKE ME

Have you ever interacted with someone challenging? Or someone you feel you cannot connect with? Interactions such as these are very common however by there may be a way to close this gap of differences you may feel. We live in a world which is deeply interconnected. Compassion Institute, a nonprofit organization advocating for compassion education, developed a practice called "Just Like Me". The purpose of this brief mental practice is to take a step back to acknowledge that we share many of the same underlying desires as humans; whether that is to feel valued, loved, happy or free from suffering. Realizing our shared common humanity allows for us to establish a basis for compassion towards others.

JUST LIKE ME - To cultivate compassion for a neutral / difficult person

1. From a place of curiosity, pick a word / phrase that epitomizes this moment of suffering / dis-ease for you... Say it to yourself, acknowledging this reality. (e.g. "This is suffering." "Frustration." "Anger." "Sadness.") Take a deep breath...
2. Reflect: "Just like me, this person also suffers and _____ (wants to be happy, doesn't like bureaucracy...),g
3. Extend a wish. Examples include "May you be free from this suffering" or "may you be at ease."

This is a link to a guided practice: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wBFNuOSP4M>

COVID Uncovering Compassion

Is it true that we must lose something to gain something?

By Eshani Goradia

Growing up I was always told,
You won't appreciate heat if you've not felt cold.
You won't appreciate our love, without a scold.
You'll only appreciate the rainbow after storms unfold.

As medical students we learn to read pain.
We listen to patient's stories as they soak in the rain.
We offer a hand as they try to explain,
But did we listen with our heart or with our brain?

But how can I empathize when I've never felt how they feel?
How can I offer advice when I've only experienced ideal?
How can I know how to treat when I don't know how to heal?
If so, truly sharing their happiness and distress is surreal.

Come 2020, life seemed to fall apart.
Savings were spent and we had to restart.
We had a few loved ones who had to depart.
It felt like multiple stabs to my heart.

We've cried more this year than ever before.
We've felt at points that we can't take anymore.
We've yelled at the wall and we've banged on the floor.
We swore and we swore and we swore and we swore!

Why Me? Why Us? Why Now? Why This?

At one point on this journey, we did not know where to turn.
Joy, Peace, and Love became the values we yearn.
Is this a blessing or a curse? We had to discern.
This may be a new beginning. A new life. A fern.

As we turn a new page, we will let this fern grow
In the direction of sunlight, it will push through dense snow
The experiences will be our soil, suffering will be the hoe.
We will feel our patient's struggles, and their feelings we'll never forego.

So was this pandemic a complete disaster?
Did we let COVID be our master?

I think not, it helped us grow faster.
We'll be better people, students, and physicians hereafter.

If we try to see the silver lining, then hope came through the form of a flask
By the pharmaceuticals set out on a life-saving task
We started asking the questions we would never ask
Is this what it took to get us to truly unmask.

~Eshani Goradia

Meet our new MeSH editors!

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