

THE LOWDOWN

Brought to you by Physicians for Social Awareness

THIS MONTH'S FEATURE

Michigan State University is proud to have outstanding individuals who are making a significant impact in their community. Through their volunteering efforts, conducting research, and advocating for disadvantaged individuals, these individuals are making a positive difference in the lives of those around them. This month's newsletter is dedicated to highlighting these exceptional individuals who embody the spirit of community engagement and social responsibility.



Alyssa Abdelnour is a current third-year medical student at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine (MSU CHM). She has a passion for providing service to resettled refugee communities, organizing educational and volunteer opportunities, and advocating for equitable healthcare.

What is ROC and why is it important to you?

Refugee Outreach Collective (ROC) is a nonprofit organization which operates within seven universities across Michigan, three of which are within graduate programs. ROC amplifies the narratives of migrant and displaced communities through building alliances and relationships. The mission of ROC is to make the United States a more welcoming place for resettling communities and to eradicate the normative concept of refugee camps.

ROC is important to me because our efforts work towards creating a more just and equitable world for those who have been displaced and marginalized. Our focus on promoting long-term solutions for resettlement can help to ensure displaced populations are able to build new lives with dignity and security.

Why is it important for future health care providers to care about this issue??

It is important for healthcare providers to care about the issues faced by migrant and displaced communities because these populations often face significant health disparities and challenges with accessing healthcare. Many individuals and families who have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict, persecution, or for other reasons may have experienced trauma, physical injuries, or have chronic health conditions which require ongoing care. Furthermore, displaced individuals may face language and cultural barriers which make it more difficult for them to access healthcare services. These challenges can be compounded by the fact they may or may not have legal documentation or health insurance, which can further limit their ability to receive care.

What tip would you have to better treat these patients?

Providers should continuously work to provide culturally sensitive care, including using interpreters or translators to facilitate communication, connect individuals with social services and resources to help them access healthcare and other necessities.



Dr. Mieka Smart is an assistant professor at Michigan State University. She directs the CHM Leadership in Medicine for the Underserved program and co-directs the Research to Reduce Disparities in Disease program. Dr. Smart coordinates education abroad for CHM and teaches global public health courses.

What inspired you to pursue a career in public health and epidemiology, and what led you to your current position at Michigan State University?

I had early exposure with an undergraduate class that I took called "public health and the law" at Johns Hopkins University. I found the course fascinating and realized that there was a lot of power at that intersection. When I realized that a career in evidence-based public health decision making would allow me to leverage my own personal strengths I continued forward down that path.

You have led and designed experiential education abroad programs in several countries, including Uganda, South Africa, Belize, and the United States. What have been some of the most significant challenges and successes of these programs, and how have they impacted the students and communities involved?

My most significant challenge is ensuring that my U.S.A. based students do not impose their world views or their cultural norms on the people they visit abroad. I'm always trying to improve my ability to make sure my students use cultural humility. My biggest success was bringing students from Uganda to the United States for an environmental health course in 2016—I still keep in touch with several of those students and I can say with all certainty that the trip to the USA was trajectory-changing for each of them.

How do your research interests in preventing mental illness and using systematic observations to monitor public health interventions translate into real-world impacts?

Systematic observations are a great way to understand health factors in the physical and social environment. Recently, we were able to show that environmental conditions in K-12 school neighborhoods are predictive of student success on standardized tests. A well written public health policy can actually have a measurable impact on the spaces where we and our families spend a lot of time. I always envision my work as generating the ammunition that policy-makers need to make necessary changes for health.



David Klemet is a third-year MSUCHM student interested in IM/EM. He hopes to humanize physicians and not perpetuate the hierarchy and power dynamic between patient and provider.

400 miles NW of Grand Rapids, on the banks of Lake Superior is Marquette, population 20,400. David Klemet, an LCE student, has spent the past 9 months in the Upper Peninsula as part of the Rural Physician Program. He reflected on how in such a tight knit community, medical students are particularly visible with unmatched exposure to learning. The month before starting rotations, David moved to the area and "spent every day biking around the town to get comfortable with the community and meet people". He has volunteered at numerous races and was delighted to learn Marquette has world renowned hiking and biking trails; "endless". From his front door, David can walk to a waterfall in 20 minutes. (Of course, it's frozen a majority of the year, but breathtaking nonetheless). Most notably however, one day after a hospital shift, David drove to the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula, sat on the front of his car, and was bathed in the northern lights!



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