AAFP Award for Excellence in GME: And the Winners Are …

Native Americans account for just 0.3 percent of U.S. physicians, but Hailey Wilson, M.D., overcame those long odds to achieve her goal and now works at a federally qualified health center that serves a largely Native American population.

David Tran, M.D., the son of refugees, also beat the odds to become a physician, overcoming homelessness and the loss of his father during college.

Jerry Abraham, M.D., M.P.H., has served in leadership roles for his county medical society and state medical association board, and this month was a member of the AAFP delegation to the AMA House of Delegates in Chicago.

I could go on about the winners of the AAFP’s Award for Excellence in Graduate Medical Education, but the curricula vitae of the 12 honorees -- along with their personal statements and letters of recommendation -- take up some 166 pages of degrees, honors, volunteering, leadership roles, publications and other accomplishments.

The Academy’s commissions are tasked with making selections for several awards the AAFP gives in recognition of exceptional service and commitment to family medicine, and it has been my honor this year to serve as the board liaison to the AAFP Commission on Membership and Member Services. At our recent summer meeting, commission members finalized the selections for the aforementioned award, which is given each year to a dozen second-year family medicine residents. The honor, supported by a grant from Novo Nordisk, recognizes outstanding residents for their leadership, civic involvement, exemplary patient care, and aptitude for and interest in family medicine.

Every member of the Commission on Membership and Member Services reviewed each of the more than 100 applications we received. It was an extraordinary time commitment to be sure, but every reviewer echoed a sense of incredible appreciation of the quality and diversity within our specialty. It was difficult to select 12 winners from the numerous exceptional candidates who applied with the support of their residency program directors.
As I thought about writing this piece, I reflected on how much our Academy and its members have influenced the medical school admission process, the selection process for family medicine residents, and the support for new physicians and emerging medical leaders.

Those medical schools with a strong commitment to family medicine and primary care include family physicians on their admission committees. They look for candidates who have connections to rural communities, an interest in a broad spectrum of practice, premedical experience working with diverse populations and underserved communities, and who have been exposed to family medicine. They seek candidates who demonstrate a breadth of knowledge and experience, as well as a desire for lifelong learning that will prepare them for the incredible variety of interactions that characterizes the practice of family medicine.

The medical students who are part of a family medicine interest group and student members of our Academy have demonstrated an early commitment, and extraordinary pre-doctoral faculty across our country are instrumental in encouraging and facilitating the journey of those students toward a family medicine residency program.

Family medicine residency programs apply similar selection criteria, sifting through the myriad of applicants for each of their residency slots, and extending invitations to those whom they feel will fit well into an established health care team that cares for a broadly diverse population. Many residency programs have a special commitment to a specific underserved population and eagerly seek applicants who have special experience and interests that will better prepare them for a future practice serving those communities.

This year’s award applications included extraordinary examples of commitment to underserved populations and research, as well as compassion, communication and knowledge-based decision-making. I applaud the commission members who made the difficult selection process work.

The winners will be recognized at a special breakfast on Sept. 22 during the Family Medicine Experience in Orlando, Fla. At last year’s award ceremony, I sat with the parents and residency program directors of two incredibly humble individuals who spoke not of themselves or their accomplishments, but instead described how much the mentorship they experienced from practicing family physicians meant to them.

When I read about the 12 individuals who will receive this year’s Award for Excellence in Graduate Medical Education, I appreciated how successfully family physicians have influenced the premedical education of our high school and college students, the pre-doctoral education of our medical students and the training of our family medicine residents. Behind each and every individual who receives this award are the thousands and thousands of family physicians across our country who make a difference every day in caring for our patients, their families and their communities. You make it possible for us to recognize a few exceptional family medicine residents. We all should take pride in the impact each of us has in growing the future of family medicine.

Here are the winners:

- Jerry Abraham, M.D., M.P.H., University of Southern California Family Medicine Residency Program at California Hospital;
- Margot Brown, M.D., Santa Rosa Family Medicine Residency;
- Stewart Decker, M.D., Cascades East Family Medicine Residency;
- Daniel Gordon, M.D., Memorial University Medical Center Family Medicine Residency;
- Christina Kinnevey, M.D., Sutter Health Family Medicine Residency;
- Adam Kowalski, M.D., Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center Family Medicine Residency Program;
- Catherine Moore, D.O., Mercy Family Medicine Residency;
- Charles, Salmen, M.D., University of Minnesota/North Memorial Family Medicine Residency Program;
- David Tran, M.D., Long Beach Memorial Family Medicine Residency Program;
- Juan Carlos Venis, M.D., M.P.H., Indiana University Health Ball Memorial Hospital Family Medicine Residency;
- Hailey Wilson, M.D., Swedish Cherry Hill Family Medicine Residency; and
- Jason Woloski, M.D., Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center Family Medicine Residency.

Carl Olden, M.D. is a member of the AAFP Board of Directors.

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