

CAFP FRESNO KINGS

MADERA

3RD EDITION 2024

FROM THE EDITOR

Advocating for Our Medical Practice and Patients: The Central Valley's Call to Action

As family medicine physicians in the Central Valley of California, we are uniquely positioned to witness both the immense challenges and the incredible resilience of our community. Our region, often overlooked in broader state-wide discussions, faces significant barriers to healthcare access, including a shortage of healthcare providers, high rates of chronic illness, and socio-economic disparities. Yet, within these challenges lies an opportunity to advocate for transformative change—for our patients, our practice, and our community.

Advocacy is not just an ideal; it is a responsibility embedded in our role as physicians. By lending our voices to address healthcare disparities, we can elevate the needs of the underserved to policymakers, stakeholders, and the broader medical community. Every policy we influence, every program we support, and every community initiative we champion translates into real-world impacts for the families we serve. From increasing access to primary care and mental health services to promoting preventive care and addressing social determinants of health, our advocacy drives tangible progress.

Even as a small group of physicians, our potential to effect meaningful change should not be underestimated. Movements are often sparked by committed individuals and small communities united by a shared vision. Through collaboration with local organizations, fostering partnerships with larger medical bodies, and inspiring the next generation of medical professionals, we can create a ripple effect that extends beyond the Central Valley. The Central Valley may not have everything, but it has us—and that makes all the difference.



A stylized, cursive signature of the name "Diana Howard" in black ink.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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*Learn about the fantastic work our medical
students do for our community*

How advocacy begins in Med School



By Brandy Ramos Nikaido, UCSF Fresno Communications

HMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS ADVOCATE FOR PREVENTATIVE HEALTH IN THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY, HOME TO THE NATION'S LARGEST HMONG COMMUNITY

“ Yet beneath this cultural vibrancy lies a stark reality: the Hmong face some of the most significant health disparities of any ethnic group in the United States ”



**VIANGKAO
LEE (SHE/HER)**
UCSF SJV PRIME
CLASS OF 2026



**TOU BEE THAO
(HE/HIM)**
UCSF SJV PRIME
CLASS OF 2027

The holiday season is in full swing—Christmas trees light up windows, wreaths grace front doors, the scent of freshly baked gingerbread fills homes, and the cheerful chime of jingle bells echoes through neighborhoods. It's a time of warmth, love, and laughter as families come together to celebrate Christmas and prepare for the new year. But for the Hmong community, a small yet resilient ethnic group originating from the mountainous regions of China and Southeast Asia, this season holds a uniquely profound significance.

In a Hmong household, amidst the familiar holiday décor, one might also find the soft glow of burning incense rising as a bridge to communicate with spirits and ancestors. Spiritual papers, carefully placed on front doors, serve to ward off evil spirits and protect the household from negative energies. The air is rich with the aroma of toasted Hmong rice cakes, a cherished tradition, while a distinct, repetitive chime echoes through the neighborhood—the rhythmic ring of a shaman's bells accompanying chants of sacred words. These rituals honor ancestral spirits, invite blessings for the new year, and reflect a centuries-old tradition unique to the Hmong people.



Here in California's San Joaquin Valley, the Hmong New Year is especially significant

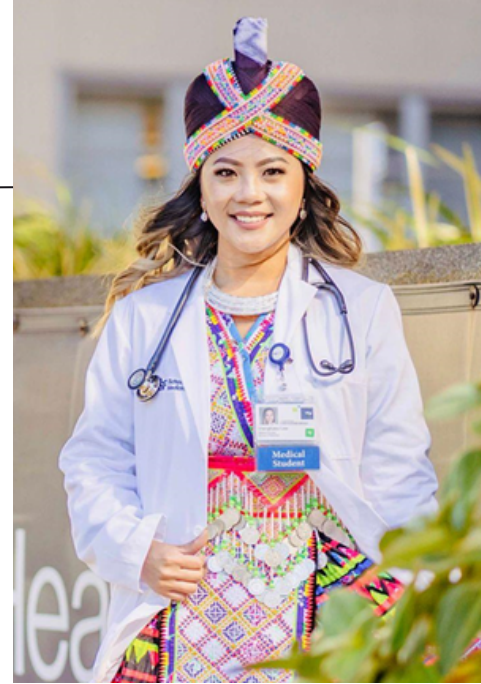
From the months of October to December, the Hmong celebrate the end of the harvest season, a time when rice fields are ripe for reaping and the fruits of their labor are ready to be shared—not only among the living but also as offerings to honor their ancestors. This tradition, known as the Hmong New Year, is a cornerstone of their cultural identity. Across the globe, Hmong communities come together during this time to celebrate heritage, unity, and gratitude.

Here in California's San Joaquin Valley, the Hmong New Year is especially significant. Known as the nation's breadbasket, the Valley's fertile soil attracted the largest Hmong population in the country following their flight from ethnic persecution in Southeast Asia after the Vietnam War. Today, Fresno County is home to over 35,000 Hmong residents. Many of the original settlers, along with those who followed, were particularly drawn to the region for its ties to their agricultural heritage—a vital source of livelihood for a refugee community grappling with poverty and the challenges of building a new life. Despite these adversities, the Hmong community's strength lies in its unity and resilience. Each December, the city of Fresno hosts the largest Hmong New Year festival in the United States, drawing over 100,000 attendees from across the country. It's a vibrant celebration where generations come together in traditional Hmong clothing to honor their past and share their hopes for the future.

Yet beneath this cultural vibrancy lies a stark reality: the Hmong face some of the most significant health disparities of any ethnic group in the United States. Nearly 50 years after the first Hmong refugees settled in the country, barriers such as limited healthcare access, cultural and language differences, and low health literacy continue to impact their health outcomes.

The San Joaquin Valley is home to many medically underserved communities, among which are the Hmong, and addressing these inequities is critical. Recognizing this need, UCSF-Fresno, a regional campus of UCSF, was established in 1975 to expand the pipeline of healthcare providers serving the region. In 2022, the UCSF School of Medicine welcomed its first Hmong students into the San Joaquin Valley Program in Medical Education (SJV PRIME), a specialized medical training track designed to recruit individuals from the Valley and equip them to serve the communities they call home. Since then, the program has welcomed Hmong medical students annually, striving to increase the presence of Hmong healthcare providers in a region with a pressing need for physicians who understand the community's unique cultural and linguistic needs. Among these students are third-year medical student Viangkaeo Lee and second-year medical student Tou Bee Thao, both of whom were born in Thai refugee camps and immigrated to the United States with their families at a young age.

In her first year of medical school, Viangkaeo recognized how deeply the Hmong community values cultural celebration. As part of her summer community engagement fellowship, she envisioned combining a cultural event with health promotion. With the help of fellow Hmong medical and pre-health students, and in partnership with the Fresno Interdenominational Refugees Ministry (FIRM), this vision culminated in the San Joaquin Valley's first Hmong health and cultural fair in July 2023. Called "Koom Tes Tiv Thaiv," or "Joining Hands to Prevent," the event drew over 350 attendees, most from Fresno County. The day featured traditional Hmong dance, music, and storytelling, as well as keynote speeches from respected Hmong leaders and physicians, much like the cherished activities of the beloved Hmong New Year celebrations. Health-related organizations provided resources and services, including COVID-19 vaccinations, health screenings, and Narcan training, while cultural exhibits showcased Hmong artifacts to educate younger generations.





PREVENTIVE HEALTH FOR OUR HMONG COMMUNITY

“Promoting preventive health within the Hmong community”



The efforts didn't stop there. Later that year, Viangkaeo, Tou Bee, and their team collaborated with UCSF's Comprehensive Heart and Multidisciplinary Limb Preservation Outreach Networks (CHAMPIONS) program to offer comprehensive cardiovascular health screenings at the Merced Hmong New Year. In December 2023, they extended their work to the Fresno Hmong New Year Festival at the Big Fresno Fairgrounds to provide flu and COVID-19 vaccinations and more health education to the community.

As Viangkaeo transitioned into her clinical rotations, Tou Bee took the lead in continuing these initiatives. In 2024, Tou Bee and the team launched a series of culturally tailored community lectures to educate Hmong families about common conditions like hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and diabetes. These lectures combined basic pathophysiology with practical advice, using culturally relevant examples to engage the community and inspire action. Surveys from the sessions showed promising results, with participants reporting an increased understanding of these conditions and the importance of preventative measures.

What began as a vision held by students has now grown into a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization called Koom Tes Tiv Thaiv, officially established this year to continue addressing the health needs of the Hmong community. As a Hmong-student-led initiative, the organization hopes to sustain ongoing outreach programs and offer health screenings and education across the San Joaquin Valley through community engagement events year-round. At the same time, it seeks to increase leadership and mentorship opportunities for the next generation of Hmong healthcare providers to ensure that this growing population receives the care it deserves. The resilience and determination demonstrated by the Koom Tes Tiv Thaiv team embody the cherished values of the Hmong community where dreams and aspirations can be turned into reality even in the face of challenges.



VIANGKAE0 HELPED SERVE AS A HMONG INTERPRETER WHILE PROVIDING BLOOD PRESSURE AND GLUCOSE SCREENINGS TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO ATTENDED THE FRESNO HMONG NEW YEAR CELEBRATION ON DECEMBER 28, 2023.



UCSF SJV PRIME MEDICAL STUDENTS ENJOYED A BOBA TEA BREAK WITH DR. KENNY BANH, ASSISTANT DEAN OF UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION AT UCSF FRESNO, AFTER THEY FINISHED ADMINISTERING VACCINATIONS TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO ATTENDED THE FRESNO HMONG NEW YEAR CELEBRATION AT THE BIG FRESNO FAIRGROUNDS ON DECEMBER 28, 2023.



TOU BEE GIVING A CULTURALLY TAILORED LECTURE ON HYPERTENSION TO A GROUP OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS AT FIRM IN THE SUMMER OF 2024



This year, as Hmong families across the San Joaquin Valley celebrate the Hmong New Year, Viangkaeo, Tou Bee, and the Koom Tes Tiv Thaiv team are focused on the future. Their next events, scheduled for December 2024, will build on the efforts they began nearly two years ago and provide health screenings and education at the Merced and Fresno Hmong New Year festivals. The team is committed to making these initiatives a regular tradition to ensure a lasting foundation for health advocacy and empower the Hmong community to embrace preventative care for generations to come.

Happy Hmong New Year! Nyob zoo xyoo tshiab!

The Hmong New Year is a time of reflection, gratitude, and renewal. It is a celebration of the harvest and a bridge between the past and the future. Just as the Hmong community has demonstrated resilience and unity in preserving its cultural identity, Koom Tes Tiv Thaiv strives to bring that same strength to tackling health disparities. By intertwining cultural heritage with impactful health initiatives, the team hopes to pave the way for healthier, more vibrant futures for the Hmong people. Through collaboration, education, and advocacy, Koom Tes Tiv Thaiv honors the legacy of the Hmong community while inspiring future generations to carry the work forward.

Happy Hmong New Year! Nyob zoo xyoo tshiab!

Pictures from Koom Tes Tiv Thaiv's inaugural event in July 2023 in collaboration with FIRM.



HMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS ADVOCATING FOR PREVENTIVE HEALTH



FREE HEALTH SCREENINGS

We will offer evaluations & screenings to identify health risks. Doctors will be available to conduct evaluations & answer your questions.

Screenings include:

- Blood Pressure
- Glucose
- Cancer Screening
- Questionnaire

Join Us!

Saturday, December 21, 2024
10:00 AM to 2:00 PM

Merced Hmong New Year - Booth #F
900 Martin Luther King Jr Way, Merced, CA 95341

Contact: Viangkao Lee
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UCSF

SJV PRIME

By Viangkao Lee (she/her), UCSF SJV PRIME Class of 2026 &
Tou Bee Thao (he/him), UCSF SJV PRIME Class of 2027

For the Valley: From the Valley

Medical Students Mentoring Premeds in the Underserved Central Valley

"Mentoring sessions have been great. I love the feedback and the honesty from the students. They're eagerly trying to help despite their busy schedules."

Quotes from Prime Time Mentees



**NEYTALI
KANWAR**
UCSF SJV PRIME
CLASS OF 2026

Growing up as an ESL student in Central Valley, where resources were scarce, I can't forget how it felt to gaze in from the outside — be it a classroom where I struggled to understand or a healthcare system that seemed far from reach. As a first-generation medical student, I believe my journey is not just my personal triumph but a chance to change the story for communities like mine, where resources are few but dreams and hopes run deep. And this is journey is not uniquely mine but one shared by several premeds who proudly call Central Valley their home.

I am Neytali Kanwar, a third-year medical student part of UCSF-SJV PRIME, a tailored track program that recruits medical students from the valley with the aim of training and hopefully retaining physicians in the valley. Coming from a low-income family, I attended Fresno city college as a first-generation student and transferred to Fresno state. I was afraid, confused, and simply lacked knowledge about the medical application process. Especially not having someone to rely on and configuring the steps myself, I often wondered how I could help bridge this gap as a medical student having dealt with the challenges and "making it to the other side of the fence". Many of SJV PRIME students with similar background shared the same spark of wanting to give back and mentor pre-meds from the valley that led to the creation of Prime Time.



Prime Time is a mentorship program run by SJV PRIME medical students that began after the success of a mentorship event hosted in collaboration with UC Merced in 2022. SJV PRIME students expanded this event and by next year, the premed mentee size quadrupled to 100 and with about 30 medical student mentors. We offer open seminars throughout March to May just before the application cycle covering various parts of the AMCAS application from tips on writing personal statements to an exclusive Q/A session by admission committee members. Mentees who are actively planning to apply to the cycle are paired with one-on-one mentor with similar background to provide tailored mentorship. The one-on-one sessions are led by students themselves with mentors available to help in any aspect of the application.



I remember my first one-on-one mentee who sent a panicked text about difficulties with having to send transcripts from community college (CC) where I helped troubleshoot and together, we identified that she needed only one transcript from CC. It was very gratifying to see the trust my mentee placed in me where she could reach out to ask about minutia or to help revise her personal statement to a heavier decision like what medical school to choose. It was rewarding because not only my mentee was growing and becoming more confident in her own capabilities, but I saw growth in myself along where I felt more reassured knowing that I was helping fulfilling the gap I had seen as a premed.

The program has received tremendous interest and even prompted the launch of the pre-med student leadership team in 2023, where pre-meds are part of several committees, including but not limited to social media, website design, event planning, and outreach. This not only helps our pre-meds refine their leadership skills and directly makes them more competitive applicants with the aim of ultimately assisting them to matriculate into medical school. Prime Time has also been collecting both qualitative and quantitative data to better understand the demographic of SJV and act as a needs assessment to configure where resources can be best allocated. All in all, this program has showed how a small community can coalesce for a shared goal of helping SJV become equipped to serve our community and its livelihood by preparing students for their journey into medicine. As I look into the eyes of these students, I see the same fire. I feel even more proud to say I am part of SJV Prime, from the valley and for the valley.

Quotes from Prime Time Mentees

“I thought the first session was very informative and had a lot of great advice. Especially having information about things I don't think about but are important like where teachers should submit letters of recommendation.”



Medical Students Mentoring Premeds in the Underserved Central Valley

PRIME TIME

SESSION 1

Christopher Teran
UCSF SJV PRIME
Medical Student
Speaker

Shizra Sipra
UCSF SJV PRIME
Medical Student
Speaker

Vanessa Mora
UCSF SJV PRIME
Medical Student
Speaker

Neytali Kanwar
UCSF SJV PRIME
Medical Student
Speaker

Charis Hoppe
UCSF SJV PRIME
Medical Student
Moderator

MARCH 18, 2023
10:00AM
**GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE
AMCAS APPLICATION**

zoom link in email
questions? email primetime.mentors@gmail.com

"These are wonderful tools for people like me who have no idea how to enroll in medical school after graduating college."

Quotes from Prime Time Mentees

MIMENTOR FREE COMMUNITY HEALTH FAIR

*PROVIDING PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE TO THE UNHOUSED
AND FARMWORKER OF THE CENTRAL VALLEY OF CALIFORNIA*



**VALERIE
DOMINGO
(SHE/HER)**

**CHSU- COM
CLASS OF 2027**

In February, osteopathic medical school students from California Health Sciences University-College of Osteopathic Medicine (CHSU-COM) volunteered at the MiMentor Free Community Health Fair at Visalia Rescue Mission that provided preventative healthcare to the unhoused and farm-working patient populations of the Central Valley.

Before the event, CHSU's Student Association of American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians (SAACOF) and Valley Reach, the campus's community service club, held a campus-wide clothing and food donation drive for the event's attendees.

OUR WORK CAN IMPACT ACCESS TO CLOTHING AND OTHER BASIC NEEDS.



Their efforts filled up tables of donations that directly improved local food insecurity and helped community members keep warm throughout the cold winter months. Attendees were also provided health services, such as flu vaccines and health screenings. Additionally, CHSU-COM provided a wide variety of health education resources. SAACOFB created and distributed pamphlets for adult immunization health education.



The pamphlets pointed out where patients can find valuable information for their health, including vaccination schedules for children and older adults. Moreover, Valley Reach provided H5N1 Avian Flu health education, and the Overdose Prevention Committee provided Harm Reduction resources. Through their collective efforts, CHSU-COM students demonstrated a strong commitment to community service, providing essential healthcare, education, and resources to support the well-being of vulnerable populations in the Central Valley.

We are excited to showcase the dedication of our residents as they advocate passionately for their patients and shape the future of medical practice.

Resident Perspective



MEET OUR NEW RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE



Gabriel Allaf DO
PGY-1
SAMC

Dr. Gabriel Allaf is a family medicine resident physician with a strong passion for psychiatry and behavioral health. Born and raised in Los Angeles, he earned his Bachelor of Science in Biology with a minor in Business Administration from Azusa Pacific University before completing a Master's in Physiology and Biophysics at Georgetown University. He then pursued his Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine at Liberty University College of Osteopathic Medicine. Throughout his medical journey, Dr. Allaf has been actively involved in research, including projects on alcohol withdrawal treatment protocols in psychiatric settings and the genetic influences of Williams-Beuren Syndrome.

His commitment to medical education extends beyond clinical practice—he is the co-founder and editor of “The Divine Intervention Podcast Anki Deck”, a study resource featuring over 15,000 flashcards designed to help medical students excel in their training. He also serves as an editor for the “American Association of Community Psychiatry (AACP) Community Psychiatry Podcast”, which provides insight into public psychiatry careers, high-yield topics, and the latest research in community mental health.

A personal interest of his is the use of artificial intelligence and its integration into both medical practice and daily life to enhance patient care and efficiency. Outside of medicine, he enjoys playing basketball and soccer, hiking, traveling, and exploring new cuisines. As a passionate foodie, he loves trying new restaurants and has ranked in the top 10% of Google reviewers for restaurants. He remains committed to providing compassionate, patient-centered care while advocating for mental health integration within primary care settings. His experiences in family medicine have reinforced his belief in the vital connection between physical and mental well-being, inspiring him to bridge the gap between primary care and behavioral health in his future practice.

Gabriel Allaf

POP Family Medicine Conference 2024: A Resident's Perspective

The resident experience of attending Family Medicine POP for the first time. The conference is an incredibly inspiring and transformative experience. It empowers to engage with fellow family physicians and residents who are deeply committed to advocating for health equity and addressing systemic challenges in healthcare..



**EMANUEL
SALCEDO, MD**
PGY-2
VALLEY HEALTH TEAM



The POP Family Medicine Conference 2024, held from August 23 to 25, was an incredible experience for family medicine residents like me. Having attended the All Members Advocacy Meeting (AMAM) previously, I appreciated an opportunity to experience POP and all it had to offer—while AMAM is all about advocating for policy changes and understanding the broader systems shaping healthcare, POP zeroes in on hands-on skills, clinical updates, and innovative ideas that directly enhance our day-to-day practice.

The variety of sessions at POP was mind-blowing. I found myself captivated by discussions like "Psychedelics and Mental Health," which challenged traditional approaches to treatment, and "Imagination and Its Role in Healing," which explored the connection between creativity and medicine. More practical topics that I began to apply in clinic as soon as I returned included the latest in HIV care and strategies for cultivating change within our communities.

What truly set this conference apart were the hands-on workshops. From refining POCUS (point-of-care ultrasound) skills to learning vasectomy techniques and improving joint injection methods, the practical training was top-notch. There's something special about rolling up your sleeves with peers, learning directly from experts, and walking away with skills that make you a better doctor.

Beyond the sessions, POP provided a fantastic opportunity to connect with fellow residents and experienced physicians. It was energizing to share ideas and hear about the unique ways family medicine is practiced across different communities. The camaraderie and mutual support made it clear we're all in this together, working to improve not just our own practices but the specialty as a whole.

A huge thank you to the California Academy of Family Physicians for organizing this outstanding conference. If AMAM fuels your advocacy spirit, POP is the perfect counterpart to sharpen your clinical and procedural skills. For residents and attendings alike, this is a must-attend event. Can't wait for next year!

“ I found myself captivated by discussions like "Psychedelics and Mental Health," which challenged traditional approaches to treatment.



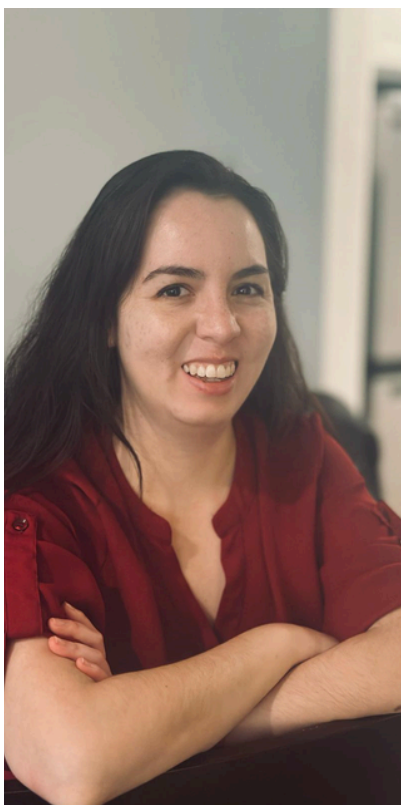
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Why family medicine should be at the forefront of healthcare reform

Meet Your New Doctor. Your Insurance Company



JENNIFER ROMO, MD
PGY-3
VALLEY HEALTH TEAM



Imagine yourself reading an excellent novel or seeing an action-packed thriller in a theater. Just as you approach the climax of the story, your experience is halted and you are left on a sudden cliffhanger...prior authorization needed. Let's say that this story is so enticing that you do all the work necessary to process a prior authorization only to be told it has been denied.. you can never find out how the story ends. That frustrating experience is an everyday occurrence for a family physician. Of all the reasons I went into medicine, the least exciting thing I never imagined becoming passionate about was wrestling with prior authorizations. Despite over a decade of learning and training in medicine, my knowledge base is no match for insurance prior authorizations and claim denials dictated by a person with no knowledge of my patients.

The need for prior authorizations to provide care to patients, which unfortunately are often followed by subsequent denials, has empowered insurance companies to supersede the medical decisions of physicians. As insurers focus on fighting what they consider to be unnecessary care, patients are left without the care that we as physicians consider necessary.

This presents a dynamic of misaligned incentives where physicians have become an obstacle for the profitability of insurance companies. While physicians grapple with prior authorizations and spend countless of administrative hours justifying their medical treatments and opinions, unfortunately, postponed treatments are leading to increased patient frustrations and sometimes can have devastating consequences. These barriers can make or break the difference between providing a cure to our patients versus them experiencing worsened chronic conditions that can precipitate an earlier death. Unfortunately, I have learned as a resident that pursuing what I believe to be essential care for my patients is often not enough to obtain that for them.

“ You do all the work necessary to process a prior authorization only to be told it has been denied.. you can never find out how the story ends. That frustrating experience is an everyday occurrence for a family physician.

Navigating healthcare insurances

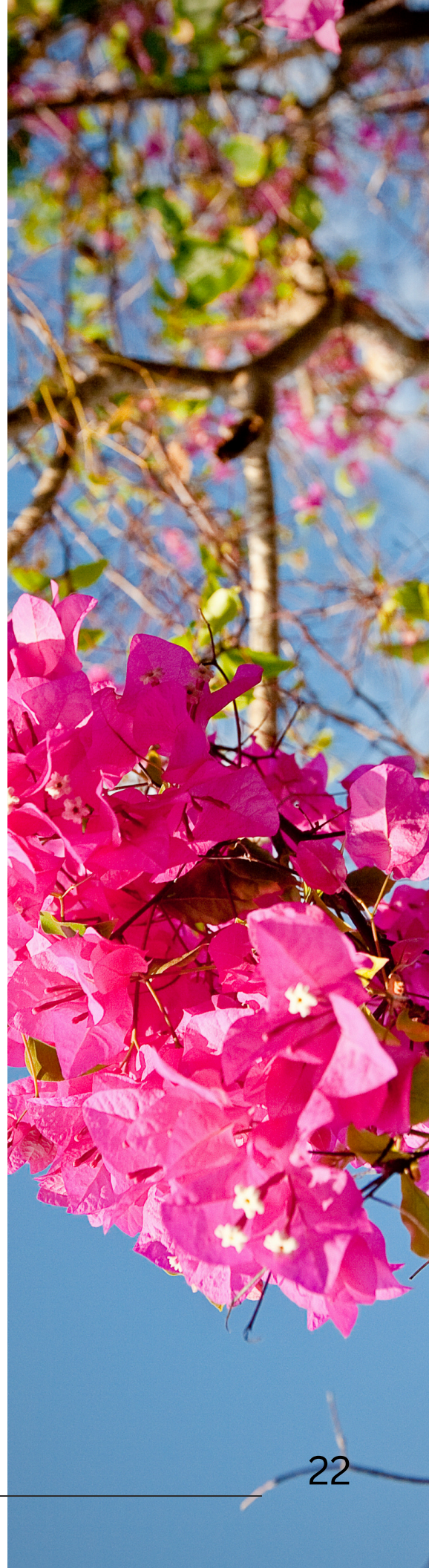
Article by Jennifer Romo MD

Events revolving the passing of a healthcare CEO in recent weeks have highlighted just how poor the general public's opinion is regarding insurance companies. It is hard to find this surprising when we consider how much people pay for health insurance only to be faced with the bureaucracy of prior authorizations, let alone denials. This situation is made more difficult by the fact that there is little to no transparency or consistency as to how insurance companies handle denials.

A 2023 report from ProPublica revealed how Cigna utilizes an automated system to reject claims it deems unnecessary and adds that similar systems are used across most major insurers. These automated denials are done at scale, reportedly 300,000 over a two month period, and with zero review of the patient's medical record and individual needs[1]. To make matters worse, insurance companies are not required to disclose their denial rates[2].

Navigating healthcare and insurance can be difficult for patients and physicians alike, but when faced against systems like these, it begins to feel like an insurmountable task that may lead to devastating consequences.

Beyond these changes, however, more can be done to alter the structure of healthcare as a whole. Earlier this month, bipartisan lawmakers proposed that pharmacy benefit managers should not be allowed to also own and operate pharmacies[3].



“My knowledge base is no match for insurance prior authorizations and claim denials dictated by a person with no knowledge of my patients.”



This type of reform directly aims to dismantle the type of competing incentives that serve to only enrich insurers at the expense of patients. As a proud Californian, I believe we can be at the forefront of medical reform. With the governor highlighting the need to expand access to care for all Californians, it is the right time to build a system that puts patients—not profits—at its core.

Family physicians are in a prime position to see the needs of a multiples generations and their communities, thus should be at the forefront of medical reform. Family physicians make up the bulk of primary care physicians and they are ideal individuals to promote change for the best interests of their patients. Furthermore, advocacy work addressing and screening for social determinants of health that affect patient’s every day can lead to addressing healthcare issues at the root of the problem. If patient’s lack healthcare support, have low health literacy, or experience food insecurity or have mental health or other socioeconomic concerns that prove to be barriers in obtaining health or care, providing support through the network of resources available at the local level could be impactful aids. California healthcare can create a powerful blueprint for a more equitable healthcare system for all.



[1] Rucker P. Miller M. Armstrong D. How Cigna saves millions by having its doctors reject claims without reading them. ProPublica. <https://www.propublica.org/article/cigna-pxdx-medical-health-insurance-rejection-claims>. Published March 25, 2023.

[2] Fields R. How often do health insurers deny patients’ claims? No one knows. ProPublica. <https://www.propublica.org/article/how-often-do-health-insurers-deny-patients-claims>. Published June 28, 2023.

[3] Robbins R. Abelson R. Bipartisan Lawmakers Seek to Break Up Giant Healthcare Conglomerates. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/11/business/warren-hawley-pharmacy-benefit-managers>. Published December 11, 2024.

Promoting Mental Health and Wellness

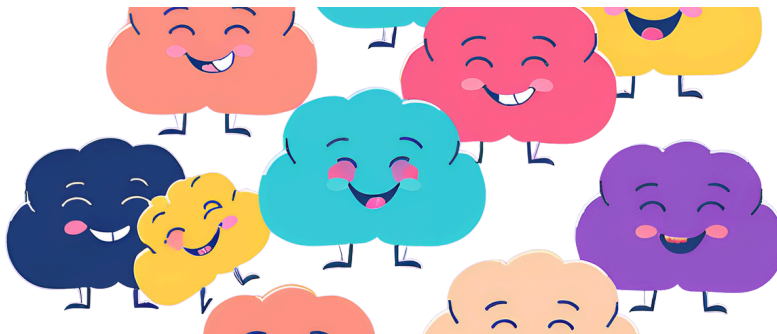
THE STIGMA SURROUNDING MENTAL HEALTH



**GABRIEL
ALLAF, DO**
PGY-1
SAMC

My name is Gabriel Allaf, and I am a first-year family medicine resident at Saint Agnes Medical Center. As a family medicine physician, I believe in the profound importance of advocating for my patients' mental health and addressing the holistic interplay between their psychological and physical well-being. Growing up in a Syrian family, mental health was stigmatized—a silence that profoundly shaped my perspective and motivated my passion for advocacy in this crucial domain.

The stigma surrounding mental health became deeply personal when I lost my closest friend to suicide. This loss left an indelible mark on me, turning my grief into a commitment to dismantling the barriers to mental health care within communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I witnessed the mental health struggles within my Syriac community, and I stepped forward to mentor and support youth facing these challenges. These experiences underscored the urgent need for open conversations about mental health and equipped me with the tools to connect with patients on a deeply empathetic level.



Family medicine is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap in mental health care. In the United States, over 40% of visits for mental health concerns—including anxiety, depression, and other behavioral conditions—are to primary care providers.



IMAGE TURNBRIDGE.COM

Family medicine is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap in mental health care

"I aim to create a safe space for patients to voice their struggles"

Family medicine physicians are often the first point of contact for patients navigating these struggles, particularly in underserved areas where access to mental health specialists is limited. This places family medicine on the frontline of behavioral health advocacy and integration. In my practice, I strive to normalize mental health discussions during routine visits. I screen for anxiety, depression, and other conditions, recognizing that these affect not only psychological well-being but also physical health outcomes such as diabetes, heart disease, and chronic pain. I aim to create a safe space for patients to voice their struggles, free from judgment, and to connect them with resources that empower them on their journey to wellness.

MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

AS FAMILY MEDICINE PHYSICIANS

Mental health stigma remains a formidable barrier, particularly in marginalized communities where cultural and systemic obstacles deter individuals from seeking care. Drawing from my own background, I understand how cultural perceptions can hinder discussions about mental health. I actively challenge these stigmas by educating my patients and their families about the importance of emotional well-being and its integral role in overall health. Advocacy, in this context, means not only providing medical care but also fostering awareness, promoting education, and encouraging open dialogue about mental health.

To promote mental health and wellness, I prioritize preventative care by encouraging patients to engage in practices that support mental well-being, such as adequate sleep, balanced nutrition, regular exercise, and mindfulness techniques. I use evidence-based tools to identify mental health conditions early and collaborate with psychiatrists and therapists to ensure comprehensive care. Additionally, I provide resources and education to demystify mental health conditions, emphasizing that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. By integrating behavioral health into my practice, I work to make mental health care accessible and approachable for all patients.

Family medicine offers a unique opportunity to integrate behavioral health into primary care. Through care coordination and longitudinal relationships with patients, family physicians can address the mental health needs of individuals and families comprehensively. This includes diagnosing and treating common mental health conditions, managing medication-assisted treatment for substance use disorders, addressing maternal mental health concerns, and supporting children and adolescents with behavioral and emotional challenges. By advocating for investments in behavioral health training, improved reimbursement models, and enhanced access to care, we can strengthen the role of family medicine in addressing the mental health crisis.



IMAGE LETTERINGWORKS

As a family medicine resident, I am committed to using my platform to advocate for mental health awareness and accessibility. I envision a future where mental health is valued as equally as physical health, and where every patient feels empowered to seek care without fear of judgment or stigma. Through compassionate care, education, and advocacy, I strive to be a dedicated advocate for mental health within my community and beyond. Mental health is not just an aspect of medicine; it is a cornerstone of overall wellness. As family medicine physicians, we have the privilege and responsibility to address this vital component of our patients' lives, ensuring they receive the care and support they need to thrive.

CALIFORNIA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL HOUSE OF DELEGATES 2024



DIANA HOWARD
MD, AAHIVS (SHE/HER)
UCSF FRESNO FAMILY AND
COMMUNITY MEDICINE

CAFP 's Specialty Delegation proudly represented family medicine at the California Medical Association's (CMA) 153rd Annual House of Delegates

Attending the CMA's 153rd Annual House of Delegates as a first-time delegate for the California Academy of Family Physicians (CAFP) was a transformative experience, offering a unique perspective on healthcare advocacy and policy-making. The Specialty Delegation, composed of representatives from all medical specialties, brought a diverse and interdisciplinary voice to the discussions, emphasizing the collaborative nature of addressing statewide healthcare challenges.

This year's major issues, "Maternity Care Deserts" and "Rural Health," highlighted the critical need for systemic solutions to improve access to care in underserved areas. As part of the CAFP delegation, I was proud to advocate for increasing family medicine obstetrics care and expanding the role of family physicians in delivering comprehensive care in rural and underserved communities.

These recommendations aim to address the alarming shortage of obstetric and gynecologic services, ensuring that all patients, regardless of geography, have access to essential care.

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Specialty Delegation (from left to right) Gregory Weygandt, MD, Kimberly Buss, MD, MS, MPH, Diana Howard, MD, Sumana Reddy, MD, and Adia Scrubb, MD, MPP,





Kimberly Buss, MD, MS, MPH

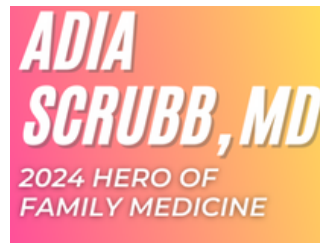


Family medicine collaborated with other specialties through the Specialty Delegation, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and collective advocacy to develop solutions that enhance access to care and improve the future of medical practice for all communities.



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CAFP Hero of Family Medicine 2024



"Adia Scrubb, MD, MPP grew up in Oakland, California and currently practices in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in Solano County. Dr. Scrubb received her Doctor of Medicine degree from the David Geffen School of Medicine/ PRIME Program at UCLA and the Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science in Los Angeles. She earned a Master of Public Policy degree from the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs and completed Family Medicine training at John Muir Health. Dr. Scrubb began participating in policy and advocacy as a medical student at Lobby Days and continued her participation through residency by submitting resolutions highlighting ACEs screenings. Her participation in the CAFP Susan Hogeland CAE Health Policy Fellowship helped her continue policy and advocacy work which included serving on the California Surgeon General's ACEsAware clinical implementation committee, joining the Family Medicine Initiative in Trauma Informed Care (FIT) team, as well as the CAFP JEDI Committee. Most recently Dr. Scrubb has testified on behalf of the CAFP sponsored bill AB 2250 as a key contact. Dr. Scrubb is strongly motivated by the desire for there to be more Family Medicine Physician presence and representation in policy and patient care."

Dr. Scrubb entered medical school with the lesson from her mentors that policy, laws, and social factors impact patient care beyond the clinic walls. This fostered an interest in advocacy and ways to impact patient care at the local and state level.



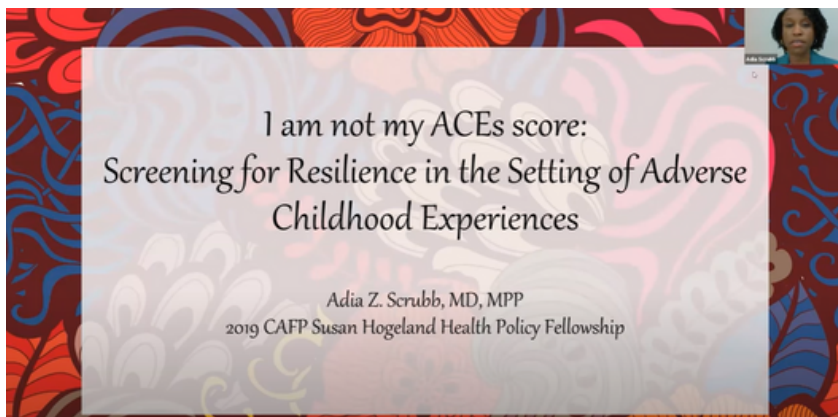
ADIA SCRUBB, MD MPP

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
AND REHABILITATION IN SOLANO COUNTY**



As a physician with knowledge in legislation and advocacy, can you share how medical students and residents get involved and learn about the CAFP?

I encourage medical students and residents to attend local chapter meetings, Lobby Days, networking events, or the All Members Advocacy Meeting (AMAM) to find out more about advocacy and policy. Scholarships for medical students and residents are often available for statewide meetings. No set of expertise is expected and the level of participation can be adjusted according to schedule availability. I began by attending Lobby Day in medical school and residency which built my confidence in speaking with legislators about my perspective as a physician and sharing patient care experiences. These events in medical school and residency provided a helpful foundation to participate in giving testimonials for CAFP sponsored bills and joining CAFP committees.



**CAFP
COMMUNITY
CONVERSATIONS: ACES WITH
ADIA SCRUBB, MD**

Get Involved!

