

Gateway Medical Society, Inc. – Closing the Gap

William Simmons, MD, President

The Gateway Medical Society, Inc. (GMS) is an organization which raises a voice for physicians of color and those physicians who care for the socio-economically challenged and underserved patients in the greater Pittsburgh community. Our central focus and mission is to: 1) promote the health and general welfare of minority; 2) promote the health and general welfare of minority and socioeconomically challenged populations in Southwestern Pennsylvania; 3) enhance the quality of health services by addressing racial and ethnic disparities in health care; and 4) enhance wellness by providing health education to the community.

Gateway Medical Society was formed 50 years ago by physicians Earl B. Smith, Oswald Nickens, and Charles Bookert. GMS is a component society of the National Medical Association which is an organization formed in 1895, a time when African-American doctors were not allowed to join the American Medical Association and were barred from most medical schools.

A part of our central focus and mission is to address racial and ethnic disparities in health care. The Center for Disease Control produced an age adjusted death rate per 100,000 persons by race. They

looked at heart disease, prostate cancer, colorectal cancer, breast cancer, stroke, lung cancer, HIV and diabetes. African Americans have the highest death rate among all of these. If you look at breast cancer specifically, white women have the highest incidence of breast cancer, however African-American women have



the highest death rate. This is what we mean by disparities.

The American Medical Association reports 37,833 physicians are black, constituting 3.8 percent of the 985,375 physicians in the US. Black male doctors account for 2% of the overall total. To address the disproportionately low representation of African American (AA) males in healthcare, we first had to acknowledge the facts that in Pennsylvania, Black male high school graduation rate is approximately 58% as compared to White males of 84%, a 26% achievement gap as reported by the Foundation for

Public Education. That report goes on to say that besides low graduation rates, AA males are faced with demonstrably inferior education institutions, they do worse on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), are disproportionately suspended and expelled and more frequently get assigned to special education classes.

Motivated by dire national statistics, in 2009, GMS started an enrichment academic mentorship program for AA males. Reviewing the results of existing programs, we initiated our program at the 6th grade level with 15 AA males selected from the Pittsburgh schools with parental interviews, letters from their teacher, and academic evaluations. The 6th grade class, called Phase I, is a 10 month program curriculum which involves monthly scheduled lessons at the medical center's human simulation center. These sophisticated computerized mannequins are placed in simulated emergency rooms, simulated ambulances, and simulated ORs with planned lessons for the students. The students are trained in etiquette, to articulate, and challenged to prepare and deliver oral presentations. During the simulation center experience they all became trained in basic CPR. During the summer they had many field trips and a week-long science camp. At the end of the 10 months, Phase I students became Phase II and a new Phase I class of 6th grader is begun.

The Phase II students continue to interact with the human simulators but at a higher, more challenging level and they start the Carnegie Learning pre-algebra Modules. They are incentivized to perform academically by a cash reward each quarter for 4.0 grade point. Since starting the program the Phase II students' average grade point has increased from a 2.9 to a 3.6, and 5 of the students routinely get 4.0's and all of the students are now above a

3.0. The pipeline will continue adding a new class of 6th graders every year with the older kids matriculating up to phase VI and graduating from high school. In 2012, we started our first Phase III class, which will be 9th graders.

The Pittsburgh community has also been invested in the success of these young men. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Heinz Endowments for their generous support to initiate the Journey to Medicine Youth Academic Mentorship Program of the Gateway Medical Society. Their continued support of our vision has been most appreciated. In addition to the Heinz Endowments, UPMC, the University of Pittsburgh, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, the Allegheny County Medical Society, the Star Program at West Penn Allegheny, the WISER Simulation Center of the University of Pittsburgh, The Falk Medical Library of the University of Pittsburgh, the PACE Foundation, Duquesne Universities' Bayer Center for Non-Profit Management, Graduate Students and Professors in the Chemistry department at Carnegie Mellon University and countless individuals have contributed time, money and talent to the development of our students.

The newly elected Gateway officers for the 2012-2014 terms are William Simmons, MD (Anesthesiologist), President, Helen Davis, MD (Ophthalmologist), Vice President, TaTanisha Smith, MD (Pediatrician), Secretary and Catherine Udekwa, MD (Pediatrician), Treasurer with Jan Madison, MD (Intensivist), Fund Raising Chair and Anita Edwards, MD (Internist) Programs Chair. GMS has a robust 2012 agenda that includes:

(1) A Community Symposium that each year addresses specific issues of disparity to fulfill our mission of providing health care education to the community. This year we are partnering with the Alpha

Kappa Alpha Sorority. This event is scheduled Saturday, June 30th, 2012, at the Haberman Conference Center, UPMC Shadyside, Hospital.

(2) A Provider Symposium for physicians in which we address pertinent critical topics important to our practices. This year we may be partnering for the first time with the Allegheny County Medical Society to address the pros and cons of computerization of medicine. This even is on a Saturday mid-September 2012 at the Haberman Conference Center, UPMC Shadyside, Hospital.

(3) The third year of our Youth Mentorship program (Journey to Medicine) which has been recognized in 3 local articles, reprinted in papers around the country, including an article in 'The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education' and were even referenced in blogs. On January 12, 2012 the Journey to Medicine academic mentorship program got a 'Distinguished Achievement Award' from the Pittsburgh Board of Education. We took in students with grade points that ranged from 4.0 to 1.5. After two years in our program we have 4 students in that class with 4.0's and everyone is above a 3.0. The one child with a 1.5 GPA now has a 3.4. We have accumulated students this year for a new 6th grade class and our ninth graders are all eligible to be a part of the University of Pittsburgh Department of Engineering's academic program called 'Investing Now'.

(4) Awarding scholarships yearly to current meritorious University of Pittsburgh Medical students of color.

(5) Community partnership events, a fundraising Gala, and quarterly meetings that include an educational lecture and dinner, which rounds out the year's activities. Gateway Medical Society Inc., a

501(c)(3) organization, has just deployed a new updated website (www.gateway-medicalsociety.org) including a 'donate now' feature for like minded individuals who agree with the importance of our programs and wish to financially help. Each year our academic mentorship program grows by 15-20 students. We are approaching 60 students at present and in three years when our pipeline has students in all 6 phases, we will have approximately 120 students each year. Future plans, our students are in schools that do not have the full array of advanced placement courses. It is our goal to partner with CCAC for our students to take those courses during phases IV, V or VI. If possible, our students will not only get the necessary building blocks to be a strong candidate for colleges or graduate programs, they will graduate from high school with college credit already knowing that they can handle the rigors of college courses. *SPQ*



Dr. William Simmons is a Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Anesthesiology at the University of Pittsburgh, School of Medicine and currently serves as a member of the Physician Inclusion Council for UPMC/PITT, Chair of an Advisory Committee on Diversity in the Dept. of Anesthesiology and is the President of the Gateway Medical Society. He holds a Certificate in Medical Leadership from the University Of Rochester Simon School Of Business and is a Diplomate of the American Board of Anesthesiology.