Herbert W. Nickens Awards

Honoring individuals who assist medical schools in achieving their diversity objectives and eliminate health care disparities

Future Leaders of Academic Medicine

AAMC Annual Meeting
Denver, CO

Monday, November 7, 2011
1:00 - 2:00 pm
Colorado Convention Center
Association of American Medical Colleges
Diversity Policy and Programs

Marc Nivet, Ed.D.
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About the Herbert W. Nickens Award

Herbert W. Nickens, M.D., M.A., was the founding vice president of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Division of Community and Minority Programs, which is now the Diversity Policy and Programs (DPP) unit.

Prior to joining the AAMC, Dr. Nickens was the first director of the Office of Minority Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. He also served as director of the Office of Policy, Planning, and Analysis of the National Institute on Aging, a part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and was deputy chief of the Center on Aging of the National Institute of Mental Health at NIH.

Dr. Nickens received his A.B. in 1969 from Harvard College and an M.D. and M.A. (in sociology) from the University of Pennsylvania in 1973. He served his residency in psychiatry at Yale University and the University of Pennsylvania. At the University of Pennsylvania, he was also a Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar and a member of the faculty of the School of Medicine.

Dr. Nickens’ passionate leadership contributed greatly to focusing national attention on the need to support underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities in medicine. His efforts resulted in a multitude of programs and initiatives that advanced the career development of minorities in medicine. Dr. Nicken’s untimely death in March 22, 1999 was a significant loss to academic medicine. The Herbert W. Nickens Memorial Fund was established by the AAMC to continue advancing Dr. Nickens’ lifelong commitment to supporting the educational, societal, and health care needs of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. The fund supports an annual Nickens award, a faculty fellowship, and five student scholarships.
Nickens Award Keynote Speaker

Dr. Charles Moore received a Bachelor of Science from Union College and his medical degree from Harvard Medical School. He subsequently completed residency training in Otolaryngology- Head and Neck Surgery and fellowship training in Craniomaxillofacial – Cranial Base, Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at the University of Michigan.

His research focus has been in the investigation of factors contributing to healthcare disparities with a particular focus on head and neck cancer incidence in medically underserved communities. He is also actively involved in research of craniomaxillofacial trauma and anterior cranial base tumor pathology.

Dr. Moore is the CEO and President of Health Education, Assessment and Leadership (HEAL), Inc. As the founder of this organization, he strives to educate the community on health issues, assess its needs and in the process build leaders from within the community to address those issues. In this position, he has created a free, comprehensive facility which provides healthcare in underserved areas in an integrated fashion. Dr. Moore is the recipient of the American Medical Association Foundation Pride in Profession, Excellence in Medicine Award and the National Academy of Otolaryngology Gold Foundation award for his work in impoverished communities. Dr. Moore is also the Chief of Service in the Department of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery at Grady Health System and a faculty member at Emory University.

Dr. Moore is the first recipient of the Herbert W. Nickens Faculty Fellowship, awarded in 2000.
Herbert W. Nickens Award

Whether breaking down racial barriers, raising the standing of black physicians within cardiology, or bringing the problem of hypertension among African Americans into the national consciousness, Elijah Saunders is all about inspiring positive change.

For three decades, Dr. Saunders has served as professor of medicine and head of the section of hypertension at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, earning him world renown as an authority on hypertension, especially as it affects minorities. Dr. Saunders has taught hundreds of medical students and remains “an energetic and powerful mentor and role model,” says E. Albert Reece, M.D., Ph.D., M.B.A., vice president for medical affairs, University of Maryland, and John Z. and Akiko K. Bowers Distinguished Professor and dean, School of Medicine.

Throughout his career, Dr. Saunders “has repeatedly demonstrated his willingness to step forward and be the first,” explains Dr. Reece. When Dr. Saunders graduated from the University of Maryland School of Medicine, he was one of only four black medical students in his class of 140. He was the first black resident to be trained in the cardiology and internal medicine programs, the first black cardiologist in Maryland, and was instrumental to desegregating the University of Maryland’s hospital wards in 1963. As a fellow, Dr. Saunders and his colleague made room assignments without considering race. “We admitted patients the way we thought they should be,” Dr. Saunders has said.

Before returning to the university to teach, Dr. Saunders had for twenty years a successful private practice in Baltimore, where the leading cause of death is cardiovascular disease. Dr. Saunders remains active in the community, starting the Hair, Heart, and Health (HHH) program to train barbers to perform blood pressure screenings and to refer clients to local health centers. Through HHH, over 1,800 people have been screened, the vast majority of whom are African American men with at least one cardiovascular risk factor.

Dr. Saunders’ investigations into the effectiveness of hypertension drugs in black patients and non-pharmacologic therapy has benefited thousands by demonstrating that some blood pressure medications are more effective than others for African Americans. As a direct result of his findings, U.S. drug companies now make a point of including African Americans in their clinical trials, helping ensure all races benefit from research breakthroughs.

A national leader, Dr. Saunders’ expertise is consistently solicited in developing guidelines about hypertension, especially as it affects vulnerable populations. He was appointed and served for 10 years as chair of the Maryland Governor’s Advisory Council on High Blood Pressure and Related Cardiovascular Risk Factors and was National Chair of the Coalition for the Advancement of Cardiovascular Health Program, which educates practitioners to provide high-quality care to underserved patients. He is a regularly invited guest on television and radio shows to speak about the risks of cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Saunders has been paramount “in attracting physicians to the field” of cardiology, says Dr. Reece. To support and promote minority providers, Dr. Saunders helped found and has led the Association of Black Cardiologists and the International Society on Hypertension in Blacks, Inc. He also co-founded the Heart House of the American College of Cardiology and the American Society of Hypertension.

In a career spanning five decades, Dr. Saunders has striven for positive change. He does, as Dr. Reece observes, “everything within his power to make equality the standard instead of the goal.”

Professor of Medicine, Division of Cardiology Head, Section of Hypertension
University of Maryland School of Medicine

The award is given to an individual who has made outstanding contributions to promoting justice in medical education and health equities for people in the United States.

Dr. Nickens believed that a multidisciplinary approach is needed to address inequities in health. Because of this, nominees may come from a wide range of fields, including medicine, dentistry, education, law, nursing, pharmacy, public health, and social and behavioral sciences.
Tumaini Rucker Coker, MD, MBA is an assistant professor of pediatrics at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and Mattel Children’s Hospital UCLA. She is also a natural scientist at the RAND Corporation and health services researcher at the UCLA/RAND Prevention Research Center (a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-funded Prevention Research Center).

After graduating from Stanford University, Dr. Coker began developing her understanding of the inequities and challenges in healthcare delivery for vulnerable populations—particularly for children in low-income minority families. She went on to study medicine at the UCLA/Drew Medical Program at the David Geffen School of Medicine, and, as a medical student, was exposed to the obstacles that prevent low-income patients from receiving needed health care services. This newfound understanding of the financial and structural limitations of the health care system propelled Dr. Coker to study organizational design and quality improvement from a business perspective, so, in 2001, she was one of the first students to receive a concurrent MBA from the UCLA Anderson School of Management and an M.D. from the UCLA/Drew Medical Program.

While at UCLA and Drew, Dr. Coker’s work was widely acknowledged. She was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha, and was awarded the Pfizer minority student fellowship, the Charles R. Drew Medical School Dr. Mitchell Spellman Award, and the American Medical Women’s Association Janet M. Glasgow Memorial Achievement Citation.

Dr. Coker was a pediatric resident at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center from 2001–2004. While there she recognized that low-income patients had multiple needs that could not be met in a 15-minute pediatric preventive, or “well-child care,” visit. She saw numerous psychosocial, parenting, discipline, and child behavioral issues that were not being fully addressed. Dr. Coker brought her training in general pediatrics to study options for redesigning well-child care for minority children in low-income communities as a Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar at the University of Chicago between 2004 and 2006.

Alongside her work in pediatric preventive care delivery, Dr. Coker has also examined issues of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in family-centered care; the health and health care of homeless children; perceived racial and ethnic discrimination and its effects on child mental health; racial and ethnic disparities in mental health care utilization; and the health and health care of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth.

Currently, Dr. Coker is directing two separate federally funded studies to design and pilot-test new models of preventive care delivery for low-income families with young children. The first study is funded by a five-year National Institutes of Health/National Institute of Child Health and Development Mentored Patient-Oriented Research Career Development Award (NIH/NICHD K23) and is in collaboration with a community health center in Los Angeles, CA. The project relies on a community-based participatory research approach and includes an expert panel that will synthesize perspectives of three key groups—health care providers, parents, and health plans—to design and
pilot test a new model for the delivery of well-child care for children ages 3 and under.

Dr. Coker is also concurrently working on a three-year Health Resources and Services Administration grant. She is the co-principal investigator and project director for a team that is developing and piloting a new model for delivery of preventive health services with L.A. Care, one of the largest public health plans in the United States.

This exemplary work to address inequities in the care for low-income and minority children has grown out of earlier, impressive research. Dr. Coker has received grants and worked on projects funded by the UCLA/Drew/RAND Project Export (an NCMHD Center of Excellence); the Academic Pediatric Association; the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; WellPoint, Inc.; California Center for Population Research at UCLA; and the UCLA Department of Pediatrics.

Additionally, Dr. Coker received the 2008 Academic Pediatric Association’s Young Investigator Award and the 2011 UCLA CTSI Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health Award. She has also been published in several top-tier journals including JAMA, Pediatrics, American Journal of Public Health, and Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine. She has also earned national mainstream television attention from CNN, NBC, and Fox News, and her work has been covered in mainstream print and online publications like Time, USA Today, The Boston Globe, Reuters, WebMD, and HealthDay News.

Dr. Coker’s long-term career goal in academic medicine is to be a nationally-recognized expert in the area of delivery system design for pediatric preventive health services, conducting research that results in improved health outcomes for minority children in low-income urban communities. She wants to be a leader in an academic medical center and serve as a mentor and teacher to junior faculty who are interested in using research to improve health and health care of historically underserved populations. Her award of the 2011 AAMC Herbert W. Nickens Faculty Fellowship will move her toward that goal by adding a technology-based tools component to her Well-Child Practice Redesign Project, the NIH/NICHD K23 research project, in order to cover costs for infrastructure upgrades, staffing, and training during pilot testing.
This Spotlight features the work of past recipients of the Herbert W. Nickens faculty fellowship, and how they have used the award to advance diversity and health equity.

**Herbert W. Nickens Faculty Fellowship “Spotlight”**

**Thomas D. Sequist, M.D., M.P.H.**
2007 Herbert W. Nickens Faculty Fellowship Recipient

As the recipient of the 2007 Herbert W. Nickens Faculty Fellowship, Thomas D. Sequist, M.D., M.P.H., continued his commitment to improving the health and health care of Native American communities. With the funding from the Fellowship award, Dr. Sequist used the grant to support the Four Directions Summer Research Program (FDSRP). Under the direction of Dr. Sequist, who served as the program’s director, the summer research program and mentorship was aimed at empowering Native American undergraduates dedicated to the healthcare of Native communities. Over the course of two years, the funding provided financial assistance for student recruitment, educational materials, program infrastructure, and enlisting the help of a Harvard Medical School student as the program coordinator for the FDSRP. In addition, the grant allowed Dr. Sequist to bring onboard 16 Native American students to participate in FDSRP at Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women’s Hospital.

**Katherine J. Mathews, M.D., M.P.H.**
2004 Herbert W. Nickens Faculty Fellowship Recipient

With the assistance of the Herbert W. Nickens Faculty Fellowship award, the 2004 recipient, Katherine J. Mathews, M.D., M.P.H., was able to put several of her medical research projects into motion. Dr. Mathews used the funding from the award to support the Community Attitudes Project which was developed to assess understandings of and attitudes towards medical research in the local African-American community. The grant also allowed Dr. Mathews, at the time an Adjunct Associate Professor at Saint Louis University School of Public Health, to conduct several informal interviews and focus groups for her research. She also expanded an ongoing project related to increasing minority participation in cancer clinical trials, and attended events relevant to her studies.

**Monica J. Mitchell, Ph.D.**
2003 Herbert W. Nickens Faculty Fellowship Recipient

Monica J. Mitchell’s dedication to research that examines children and families coping with chronic illnesses is exemplified through her accomplishments. In 2004, The Cincinnati Children’s Hospital hosted the 3rd Annual Sickle Cell Disease Research and Education Day to a more promising turnout than the previous year. The program, developed by Dr. Mitchell who is the 2003 Herbert W. Nickens Faculty Fellowship recipient, was funded in full by the grant from the Nickens award that year.

In addition, Dr. Mitchell, at the time, an Associate Professor of Pediatrics and in the Department of Psychology at the University of Cincinnati, received institutional recognition for assisting in the development of three measures aimed at assessing the outcomes in children with sickle cell disease. These measures were instituted at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, Columbus Children’s Hospital, and Rainbow Babies & Children’s Hospital in Cleveland, the three largest children’s hospitals in Ohio.
Monique Chambers
University of California, Davis, School of Medicine

These awards consist of five scholarships given to outstanding students entering their third year of medical school who have shown leadership in efforts to eliminate inequities in medical education and health care and demonstrated leadership efforts in addressing educational, societal, and health care needs of minorities in the United States.

Monique Chambers is a third-year medical student at University of California, Davis, School of Medicine, but she treated her first patient long ago. At the age of 10, she learned that she could not count on physicians and the state of the health-care system to sustain her family’s health. She realized that it would take a leader, a physician-leader to bring about the necessary changes, as she faced her older brother who had trouble breathing during an early morning asthmatic episode attack. It wasn’t until Ms. Chambers was older that she came to understand why her uninsured father would warn her against calling the paramedics. She reaffirmed her commitment to becoming a physician-leader with competency and “driven by passion” to pursue a medical career that would help eliminate the pervasive injustices in the broken system.

Ms. Chambers received a B.S. in biology at the University of LaVerne in California in 2008, graduating summa cum laude. As part of her undergraduate studies, she was a United Negro College Fund Special Programs intern in 2007 and was placed at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) Ames Research Center in Mountain View, Calif., to assess impacts of space flight on the skeletal system. For her research, Ms. Chambers received the NASA Science and Technology 2007 Leadership Award.

An active leader no matter the discipline, Ms. Chambers is a former pre-Olympian track and field athlete and an outspoken advocate for the arts, namely acting and spoken word which she continues even during her medical training. At the University of La Verne, she created a local venue for poetry slams where others could openly express their ideas about the world around them. As a medical student, Ms. Chambers has been instrumental in organizing and participating in efforts to attract applicants from disadvantaged communities to UC Davis School of Medicine.

As president of the UC Davis School of Medicine chapter of the Student National Medical Association, she organized the National Leadership Conference, which drew 100 student leaders from around the country to examine the topic of excellence in minority and underserved health care.

With her belief that the conceptions that medical students bring into the examination room shapes their biases and provision of medical services, Ms. Chambers has made numerous efforts toward improving the cultural competency of medical students. She developed an elective course for the medical school on health-care disparities and the historical bases of the fears and suspicions that some minority groups have with the health care system. She also organized a series of lectures given by African American health-care professionals during Black History Month. Ms. Chambers also assists with the School of Medicine’s Diversity Council and has coordinated mentorship events with the Minority Association of Premedical Students. Over the past year, Ms. Chambers has served as the co-director of the Imani Clinic, a community clinic staffed by student volunteers that serves the largely African American and Latino populations in South Sacramento. Part of her role is working with the Sacramento Cancer Coalition, Imani Clinic’s partner organization, to encourage greater participation by the black community in the clinic’s screening programs.

Ms. Chambers was a 2011 National Medical Fellowship Aetna Scholar, 2010 Sinkler Miller Medical Association Scholar, and 2010 Ella Mae Simmons Scholar from the Kaiser Permanente African American Professional Association. At the school of medicine, she was a 2010 Medical Student Research Fellow and Chancellor’s Scholar in 2009–2011. A physician-leader, she affirms, creates the future, is a trail blazer, honors the value of faith, and knows when to follow.
Toussaint Mears-Clarke is a third-year student at the University of Chicago-Pritzker School of Medicine with experience teaching sciences and languages in the U.S., Jamaica, El Salvador, and Peru. He hopes to use his skills and medical training as a primary care physician, advocating for and practicing preventive medicine on behalf of underserved populations while reducing health care disparities.

Mr. Mears-Clarke attended high school at Milton Academy in Boston and studied at Oberlin College, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a biology major and chemistry minor. He was a frequent volunteer in his time at Oberlin. As a local Boys and Girls Club volunteer, he taught children about science and nature as well as how to plant and maintain community gardens. As a member of Oberlin Students in Solidarity with El Salvador, Mr. Mears-Clarke traveled to the rural community of Santa Marta, where he taught Biology and English to high school students.

After graduation, Mr. Mears-Clarke taught SAT math to high school students in Jamaica and volunteered as an English teacher for adults in the community night school program in Leymebamba, Peru. While in Leymebamba, he organized a six-week English Language summer camp for young people in the community and worked at the local boarding house for high school students as a tutor, and English tutor.

Mr. Mears-Clarke sees his life’s mission as providing healing and compassion; building relationships with others; and working to make healthier communities. These ideals have framed his time in medical school, where he has worked on a number of community service projects. He has volunteered as a Spanish translator at clinics and co-led the Health Professions Recruitment and Exposures Program, which is run by medical students to assist and encourage minority high school students, from the South Side of Chicago, to explore careers in the health professions. Mr. Mears-Clarke also co-led a team of undergraduate students, high school students, and medical students with the development and implementation of a sustainable community service project in Chicago’s Woodlawn neighborhood as part of the Summer Service Partnership Program. The project taught young people in the neighborhood to identify misconceptions about condom use, sex, and STIs.

In his first year of medical school, Mr. Mears-Clarke was named a Schweitzer Fellow, for which he volunteered weekly at Chicago’s Project Brotherhood, a community-based outreach program that works to increase black men’s health awareness while emphasizing the importance of physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and economic wellness. Mr. Mears-Clarke led group discussions on healthy living, nutrition, and diseases such as STIs, prostate cancer, and heart disease. He also organized a prostate cancer health fair at the Project Brotherhood clinic. Additionally, he interviewed African-American men for a video series on topics such as addiction, incarceration, success, and healthy living.

Mr. Mears-Clarke’s first-hand experience as a volunteer has revealed the problems faced by the underserved to maintaining good health and obtaining good health care; he looks forward formulating solutions to these most pressing issues.
Teresa Schiff, a third-year medical student at John A. Burns School of Medicine University of Hawaii, was drawn to helping people through her experience as a volunteer during her undergraduate years in Los Angeles. As a volunteer preparing and delivering food to homeless individuals on Skid Row in Downtown Los Angeles, the stark contrast between the expensive cars and beautiful buildings at University of Southern California with the extreme poverty in the inner city had an impact. This experience formed the root of her passion for working with underserved communities, empowering individuals to live the best life possible, and support these individuals on their journeys.

Ms. Schiff, a Hawaii native, attended University of Southern California in Los Angeles, where she studied biological sciences. At USC, she volunteered in public middle schools to teach science and nutrition courses to 6th and 7th graders. She also studied in Central America for a semester, learning the importance of public health and education while assisting local physicians in providing healthcare to remote communities of Panama, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

Through this experience, Ms. Schiff saw the close relationship of education and medicine, so after graduating cum laude from University of Southern California, she chose to join Teach For America. In a small town called Rio Grande City on the Texas-Mexico border, she taught high school physics and chemistry for two years. Ms. Schiff discovered through her time in the classroom that when equipped with a strong educational foundation, students made better decisions about their diets, their behaviors, and their life choices.

As a medical student and future physician, Ms. Schiff enjoys educating her patients and empowering them to take responsibility of their lifestyle choices. Her love for education also carries over into a unique program for Hawaii’s teens. In October 2009, three months after starting medical school, Ms. Schiff began work with two other students on Teen Health Camp Hawaii, a motivational program designed to teach underrepresented middle and high school students in rural Hawaii about health and healthcare careers. The program inspires youth to become leaders while targeting our health system’s inequities and addressing the problem of physician shortages by motivating youth to take up the medical profession.

Ms. Schiff is also a co-creator of the Partnership for Social Justice, an interdisciplinary organization dedicated to health equity for all. She is also working with the Associate Dean for Medical Education and the Office of Medical Education to develop the “Dean’s Certificate in Social Justice.” This 4-year curriculum, offered concurrently with the M.D. degree, interweaves ideals of humanitarianism and social responsibility throughout the undergraduate medical experience to foster these as life-long pursuits. It is the first such program at the medical school.

In addition to her other novel efforts, Ms. Schiff worked with a faculty member to examine the effect of traditional Hawaiian massage in the treatment of hypertension. She also co-authored an article that was published in Hawaii Medical Journal, and her work was presented at the American Public Health Association’s Annual Meeting in 2010.

Ms. Schiff is eager to continue working in medicine and public health to make systemic changes that affect people’s long-term outcomes and push forward the understanding that health is a human right.
LaShon Sturgis, Ph.D.
Medical College of Georgia at Georgia Health Sciences University

LaShon Sturgis, a native of Decatur, Ga., studies at the Georgia Health Sciences University Medical College of Georgia. She graduated from Paine College magna cum laude with a B.S. in Biology and holds a Ph.D. in Physiology from Georgia Health Sciences University. Dr. Sturgis was also selected for the inaugural class of the Medical Educators Training Program for Ph.D. basic scientists to receive advanced, hands-on instruction in medical education, at Ross University School of Medicine, Dominica.

As a first year medical student, Dr. Sturgis was elected Curriculum Vice President and was selected to serve on numerous committees, which she used to convey students’ recommendations and help her peers better understand diversity, cultural competence, and healthcare disparities. Dr. Sturgis was also selected as the student coordinator for the Students for Community Outreach elective, which taught medical students how to teach middle school students about healthy living. She developed a game to help students make better food choices, and she was awarded the Elaine J. Stone Award by her peers as the medical student who most encouraged healthy living in the children.

Dr. Sturgis served as the curriculum coordinator for the Junior Medical League: a collaboration between Medical College of Georgia medical students and the local Boys and Girls Clubs. The program exposes participants, who are mostly underrepresented minority and/or disadvantaged, to careers in the medical field while encouraging them to establish goals and work toward academic and professional achievement.

During the summer of 2010, Dr. Sturgis participated in a medical mission trip to Peru, where the team traveled into the rural villages to perform pelvic exams and pap smears on women who otherwise would not receive such services. In addition, Dr. Sturgis was selected to participate in the Dean’s Summer Research Program. Dr. Sturgis’s research was accepted as an oral presentation at the AAMC Southern Group on Educational Affairs meeting in Houston, Texas. She was also simultaneously employed as a teaching assistant for a rigorous Anatomy course for allied health students and as the Resident Hall Supervisor for the Student Educational Enrichment Program, which allowed her to mentor high school and college students from underrepresented minority and disadvantaged backgrounds with aspirations for medical careers.

During her second year of medical school, Dr. Sturgis continued her curriculum committee responsibilities and was also asked to serve on numerous search committees for recruitment of a Associate Dean for Diversity, anatomy teaching faculty, and a Northwest Georgia clinical campus Dean.

Dr. Sturgis is president of the Medical College of Georgia’s chapter of the Student National Medical Association, which she developed in a new direction. She created a conference called “Igniting the Dream of Medicine,” to expose 148 local and regional high school and college students to information designed to help them become competitive applicants for medical school. As a result of her leadership and commitment to advancing the mission of Georgia Health Sciences University, Dr. Sturgis was selected for the McGraw-Hill/Lange Medical Student Award and the Georgia Health Sciences University Faculty and Spouses Award.

Dr. Sturgis is committed to addressing inequities and creating opportunities for the underserved, and will strive to make this world a better place than she found it.
Martha Tesfalul developed her interest in medicine as a high school student in Houston, TX, where she volunteered at Texas Children’s Hospital and conducted clinical research at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. Over the past six years, she has continued to promote wellness in Boston, Harlem and more recently Baltimore as well as in Eritrea and Sudan.

Ms. Tesfalul is the eldest of five children, which she credits with giving her the understanding of the impact she could have on other people’s promise for the future. She began creating impact at a young age and was accordingly recognized with a number of school- and district-wide awards as well as distinction as a National Achievement Scholar and a National Merit Scholar.

During her college years at Harvard University, Ms. Tesfalul studied sociology and health policy and thereby developed a better understanding of what causes and perpetuates suffering. She worked with Southern Sudanese refugees in Cambridge and learned how empowerment via rights, education, and resources was vital to the realization of their improved health outcomes. She also conducted laboratory research in leukemia/lymphoma through the Harvard Stem Cell Institute; created curriculum development materials for Health Leads’ national youth group programs; investigated solutions to the distinct health challenges faced by young men of color at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; and coordinated a program targeting youth at risk for developing Type II diabetes.

After graduating cum laude in 2009, Ms. Tesfalul put her experience directing a Harvard student organization promoting development in Africa into practice. She went to Eritrea on a Booth Travelling Fellowship to investigate the priorities of the country’s lead health institutions around mental health.

In her three years at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Ms. Tesfalul has already been granted rare honors. Due to her work during college with Health Leads, Ms. Tesfalul was asked to help implement Health Leads’ first graduate student-staffed help desk, which connects patients visiting Johns Hopkins Bayview Emergency Department to crucial resources including health insurance and food stamps. She is also a lead coordinator for the Brotherhood Alliance for Science and Education, a program that provides longitudinal mentorship to select minority men in Baltimore City public high schools. Additionally, she is an active member of Hopkins Student National Medical Association, through which she established a program creating small mentoring communities between minority faculty members, house staff, graduate students, and medical students.

Ms. Tesfalul’s work during medical school has also had international impact. During her first summer in medical school, she was a guest faculty member at the University of Juba College of Medicine in Sudan as part of her work with the Southern Sudan Medical Education Collaborative. She traveled to Juba to help support the transitioning School of Medicine by developing and implementing an eight-week neurophysiology curriculum for their third-year medical students and a two-week long introductory community medicine course for their first- through third-year medical students. Since then, she has worked to link University of Juba College of Medicine and Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

In the near future, Ms. Tesfalul hopes to become involved in the implementation of Maryland’s Health Benefit Exchange and to pursue an M.P.H. She aspires more long-term to continue the promotion of wellness by educating and empowering vulnerable minority communities both domestically and internationally.
Special Acknowledgements

Our sincere appreciation is expressed to the Herbert W. Nickens Award Committees for their hard work and dedication to the awards program.

Herbert W. Nickens Award Committee
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