HMSOM Commencement 2024: First Graduating Class of Over 100 for NJ’s Newest Medical School

One hundred and two students from the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine have received their medical degrees—and are now poised to start their medical careers in residencies at top programs across the country.

The medical students came from the 2020 cohort of the medical school (75 students) who graduated after four years; and also the 2021 cohort (27 students), who completed their education in three years.

Since graduating the inaugural class of 18 doctors in 2021, the school’s classes have grown annually alongside admissions, and this is the first time the graduate total for one class has been over 100.

“The Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine was founded upon great ambition and ideals,” said Robert C. Garrett, FACHE, CEO of Hackensack Meridian Health. “Under its able leadership, it is changing the way that doctors are training—and what medicine can ultimately be.”

“The school is truly reaching its stride,” said Jeffrey Boscamp, M.D., dean and president of the School. “Our curriculum is training the best doctors for the 21st century, and our institution is making a difference across the landscape. We are proud of what we’re doing, and we are excited about all our ongoing work.”

The commencement’s keynote was delivered by Steve Pemberton, an author, philanthropist, speaker, and senior-level executive for the...
likes of Monster.com, Walgreens Boots Alliance, and Workhuman.

Roughly half of the Class of 2024 (50 students) will train in New Jersey for the first year of residency. Of these, 36 of the students matched into a Hackensack Meridian Health program.

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**Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine ‘Match Day’ Ushers Students Toward Residencies**

Students on the cusp of earning their medical degrees from the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine are set to go on to their residency programs across the country.

The Match Day® annual tradition took place at MetLife Stadium in March, on a day when thousands of other medical students around the country also discovered their own next career milestones.

“This medical school continues to train the best doctors to confront the challenges of the 21st Century,” said Robert C. Garrett, FACHE, chief executive officer of Hackensack Meridian Health. “It is incredible to have so many of these fine professionals coming to their residencies in our health network, helping to be the leaders of positive change.”

“Match Day is a time-honored tradition, and it’s one of the highlights on the calendar,” said Jeffrey Boscamp, M.D., president and dean of the school.

“Our students have earned this moment of excitement on their way to amazing careers.”

The 102 students are among tens of thousands who found out where they will “Match” through the National Resident Matching Program® (NRMP).

This was the fourth Match Day for the school, which received its full accreditation from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) in February 2023. Residencies where this class has matched include: locations across the Hackensack Meridian Health network; Stanford Health Care; New York University Langone; Yale - New Haven Hospital; Montefiore Medical Center/Einstein; Thomas Jefferson University; Brown University/Rhode Island Hospital; New York Presbyterian, Weill Cornell Medical Center; and many other top institutions.

We wish all of our future doctors the very best as they continue achieving their dreams!

**Human Dimension Director, Assistant Dean Rocchetti Honored with EJI Excellence in Medicine Award**

Congratulations to Carmela Rocchetti, M.D., director of the Human Dimension (HD) curriculum and assistant dean of Community Engaged Education at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine.
(HMSOM), for being honored with the EJI Excellence in Medicine Award.

Dr. Rocchetti was cited for her role in helping to develop the curriculum and helping to guide the social-determinant-of-health focus of HMSOM, which admitted its first cohort of students in 2018.

Dr. Rocchetti helped to develop and now leads the HD course, a unique program addressing health inequities through a progressive medical school education. Through the HD course, the community is the classroom - and the students go right out into the community to learn about working with people and families right in their homes. The HD process impacts peoples’ lives, as students learn about social determinants of health by working closely with individuals and families from underserved areas. The goal of this centerpiece of the HMSOM curriculum is to train physicians to understand that context matters and to learn how to address the social, behavioral, and environmental determinants of health. Medical students recognize and apply drivers of health outcomes; practice health care with cultural competency, humility, and sensitivity; discuss the existence and magnitude of health care inequities and collaborate with other health professionals and community members regarding these issues; and, most importantly, create solutions that address health care inequities.

More than 400 families are reached through HD. The program works with more than 120 community partners in 20 different municipalities across the state of New Jersey.

HMSOM Medical Education Week 2024: Many Innovations, Much Discussion

Faculty, staff, students and residents from across the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine (HMSOM) and Hackensack Meridian Health took part in the proceedings of the HMSOM’s second-annual Medical Education Week.

Nearly 200 people took part in the events over the course of the week, which included workshops, discussions, poster sessions, abstract awards and a plenary session.

The focus throughout was on innovation in medical education across the spectrum - from the medical school level to graduate medical education (residency training) to faculty development and more - all with the goal of advancing health professions education to the ultimate end: Providing better care in the clinical setting.

An opening session and “Med Ed Journal Club” kicked off the week. It featured a discussion of a recent academic paper about how to educate for adaptive expertise, along with the analysis of a podcast episode with the authors. The session was facilitated by Vice Dean for Academic Affairs Miriam Hofmann, M.D., and Jennifer Zepf, D.O., the course director of The Developing Human and an associate professor of Medical Sciences. The gathering was followed by a session sponsored by the Academic Medicine Student Interest Group entitled “Pulling back the curtain on the SOM curriculum.”

Read more
Student Research and Innovation Inspires on Medical Student Research Day

Students from across the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine (HMSOM) showed off their new ideas and long hours of inquiry during the school’s third annual Medical Student Research Day.

The some 130 abstracts spanned a wide gamut of health related topics, from how certain diseases affect groups across America differently due to the social determinants of health, down to the level of single molecules in other pathologies.

Welcome and introductions were made by Jeffrey Boscamp, M.D., president and dean of HMSOM; and also Vice Dean Stanley R. Terlecky, Ph.D., and Assistant Dean Zhiyong Han, Ph.D.

The keynote speaker was Lewis C. Cantley, Ph.D., professor of cell biology at Harvard Medical School and longtime biotech researcher. His talk “Developing an Atlas of the Substrate Specificity of All Human Protein-Tyrosine Kinases,” introduced a new technology which allowed clinicians to determine key proteins in tumor biopsies, allowing better targeting of key drugs.

Two featured student presentations were offered by second-year students. Shady Barsoom described the “Demographic and Socioeconomic Disparities in Acute Pancreatitis Stratified by Etiology” - a project showing how different racial and socioeconomic factors among groups manifested differently in the condition. Mai Hatazaki presented work showing that retinoic acid may be an important new treatment option for tracheal stenosis, a pathological accumulation of granulation tissue in the airway. Both students worked extensively with clinical mentors from within the Hackensack Meridian Health network.

The poster session took place in five separate sessions spanning the afternoon, which included more than 130 research posters.

Read more
Human Dimension Hosts NJ Superintendents, Principals to ‘Support Our Schools,’ Students Mental Health

The Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine (HMSOM) along with the New Jersey Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (NJAAP) hosted a groundbreaking event in April, titled “The Social Determinants of Learning Summit: Advancing Systemic Solutions for K-12 Well-Being.”

The summit marked the beginning of an initiative aimed at convening system leaders to understand the factors influencing well-being and to empower them to pioneer innovative systemic solutions.

HMSOM has been committed to helping identify and respond to community needs since its inception in 2018. The Human Dimension program within HMSOM is a unique curriculum that fosters teamwork and a humanistic focus on community wellness. Medical students learn about the upstream factors that impact a person’s well-being and the importance of advocacy and community engagement.

The summit on April 11 brought together school leaders from across the state at the School of Medicine. The day was filled with robust discussions and connections amongst school leaders and HMH programs.

Preparation Meets Opportunity: Biologist-Turned-Med Student Publishes COVID-19 Vaccine Study

It’s not every day a person’s experience, education, and training converge into professional success so early in one’s career.

But that day has come for first-year Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine (HMSOM) student Elizabeth Titova, whose background in phlebotomy and scientific research led her clinical study around COVID-19 vaccination to be published in Microbiology Spectrum, an open-access ASM Journal.

Titova, of Fair Lawn, N.J., was a scientist and clinical research coordinator for two years at Hackensack Meridian Health’s Center for Discovery and Innovation (CDI), completing her 2023 research study before beginning her med school career. She recruited more than 600 patients to assess T-cell and antibody responses in COVID-19 vaccinated patients with
special focus on immunocompromised individuals. Her research was completed in partnership with HMH’s John Theurer Cancer Center (JTCC) and with clinical laboratory firm Quest Diagnostics.

“I was ecstatic to hear that all our efforts have finally come to fruition,” said Titova. “These are important results that we collected and analyzed during a global health crisis. We have done our part to bolster the scientific literature.”

In her study, Titova found that while naturally stronger in immunocompetent individuals, the immunocompromised population—“especially cancer patients undergoing treatment”—still received a “robust immune response” from the vaccine, indicating protection against SARS-CoV-2. This response would impact both likelihood of infection, as well as the possibility of the disease’s progression into its potentially-deadly complications, most prevalent in those with comorbidities including immune deficiency.

Titova has been published as a research scientist since first beginning with the CDI. She now hopes to be a leader in the clinical setting.

HMSOM Faculty Demonstrate How They Built The Entire HMSOM Curriculum Driven By The School’s Vision, In New Paper

May 13, 2024

Medical schools need to be socially responsive and change with evolving times to produce the best healers possible.

The Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine (HMSOM), which admitted its first students in 2018 and has trained hundreds of new doctors, has demonstrated a new way of doing things, according to a new paper in the journal Clinical Teacher, a Wiley publication.

HMSOM developed its entire curriculum based on its ideals of improving medicine, including access and health equity for all, according to the paper.

“HMSOM’s curriculum offers insight into how it is possible to have social accountability serve as the mission of the institution and be realized comprehensively across all educational efforts at the school,” write the authors.

“In short, we illustrate how the social accountability mission of a medical school can act as the central guiding force informing all aspects of the medical school - from the content of the curriculum to the structure of the educational program,” adds the group, consisting of: Vice Dean Miriam Hoffman, M.D.; Keith Metzger, Ph.D., the associate dean of Medical Education; and Ofelia Martinez, M.D., MPH, the assistant dean of Medical Education. Read more

SOM Publishes Paper on its Unique Competency-Based Curriculum

Since its inception, the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine (HMSOM) has had a competency-based curriculum, unlike its peers who structure their programs centered mostly around a time-bound curricular structure.
Since the first students started their education at HMSOM in 2018, through to the present, this has meant that there is an individualized focus tailored to the students’ educational needs and goals. When more help is needed, this means extra time for the doctors-in-training to master core skills and knowledge; and it means further opportunities for research projects, or even additional Master’s degrees, for the quicker learners among the cohorts.

This unique curriculum is working - and working well, report SOM leaders in a new publication in the journal Medical Education Online published in April.

“The structure of our educational program aims to make (medical school) curricula less time-bound, and driven more by student competency acquisition and individual goals,” write the authors, who are: Miriam Hoffman, M.D., vice dean for Academic Affairs; Lindsey Dedow, Psy.D, assistant dean of Advising and Career Development; and Jeffrey Boscamp, M.D., president and dean of the school.

New HMSOM Elective Equips Students for Strategic Planning, Knowledge to Become Physician Leaders

A new elective is being offered at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine that aims to train medical students for overall health care strategy, while preparing the next generation of physician-leaders for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century.

“Strategic Planning in Health Care” is a semester-long part-time elective course providing students with a comprehensive overview of health care strategy. Students are learning the principles and frameworks of strategic planning in health care, as well as the challenges and opportunities facing the health care industry. The elective also covers a variety of topics related to health care strategy, including market dynamics, delivery models, service line growth, research and innovation, and financial planning. Students will develop a project in one area of their choice.

The goal is to prepare students to: define health care strategy; analyze the industry to determine trends; better understand market dynamics and use market analysis tools; evaluate and compare different delivery models; develop strategies for growth and development; assess the role of research and innovation for the future; and apply financial planning principles to health care organizations.

For more information about this elective, please contact Mohammed Quadri, M.D., at mohammed.quadri@hmhn.org.
New Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Gemeda Fosters Community

For Mekbib Gemeda, Ed.D., it’s about community. Gemeda, who started in March as the new senior associate dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine (HMSOM), is planning to bring his core philosophy of human, interpersonal connection to the school.

“I always think my job is creating communities and partnerships,” said Gemeda recently. “The job gets done out of those relationships you build.”

Gemeda comes to HMSOM from Eastern Virginia Medical School. His arrival at HMSOM is somewhat of a homecoming. Gemeda was born in Ethiopia and educated in Croatia, but he earned his Master’s degree from Seton Hall University and lived for several years in Essex County. In fact, it was his time here and at Hunter College which inspired his pursuit of diversity and inclusion in his career arc.

Gemeda is married with two children—a son working as an actor in Manhattan and a daughter who is studying at the Rhode Island School of Design. His move to New Jersey brings him closer to them—while also affording him new opportunities.

Read more

New Faces at HMSOM

We’re thrilled to welcome Katrice Francisco to HMSOM as our newest Clinical Skills Technologist on the Clinical Skills Team! Katrice brings a unique blend of skills and experiences, having recently earned a B.S. degree in Information Technology with minors in Computer Science and Public Health at Montclair State University. She’s also worked for a vertical farming company and is passionate about mentoring children in tech.

Katherine Lopez has joined HMSOM as the new Phase 3 Administrator. A graduate of Rutgers University with a B.A. in Psychology, Criminal Justice, and Sociology, Katherine previously worked in numerous health care settings and volunteered as an EMT for five years.

Congratulations to Lisa Chagnon, who received the April Culture Circle Choice Award at the April birthday and work anniversary celebration. On behalf of the HMSOM Culture Circle members, Donna Wexler commended Lisa for continuously going above and beyond, working across SOM and the HMH network to provide mentorship, advising and doing whatever it takes to be there for those in need.
Allison Brown Brings Empathy to a Future in Medicine

When Allison Brown was young, her family nicknamed her “Doc,” thanks to her massive amount of empathy. Now an adult who just graduated from the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine (HMSOM), that desire to help others has only grown.

“I’ve always had a yearning for personal connections. The opportunity to listen to patients’ stories, capture their voices and treat their woes drove me toward medicine,” Brown said.

The Stanford University grad originally from California, says she was immediately attracted to the fact that HMSOM was a newer medical school. Allison, a competitive swimmer, says she’s enjoyed every phase of the med school experience, from didactics in Phase 1 to clerkships in Phase 2 and further exploration of medicine in Phase 3. As if her schedule isn’t full enough, she’s also served as a student ambassador as well as a peer tutor/mentor.

“Allison Brown is a credit to our school,” said Jeffrey Boscamp, M.D., president and dean of HMSOM. “Her work throughout her years pursuing her medical degree proves her academic excellence—and also her incredible empathy. She’ll make a great doctor.”

Read more

James Behrmann Inspired by Family Experiences

From being the designated “splinter remover” for his family as a child, to watching pimple-popping YouTube videos during his teen years, James Behrmann’s unique interest in dermatology now makes perfect sense. It seemed the young man from Chatham, N.J., was destined to choose a career in health care. But perhaps the most meaningful reason he was determined to succeed in medicine was rooted in his experiences with, and love for, his mother.

“My mom has been in and out of doctors’ offices for as long as I can remember, which led me to hold a certain reverence for the profession,” said Behrmann. “I remember attending an appointment after she was diagnosed with bladder cancer, and her surgeon proposed the idea of removing her bladder and replacing it with part of her intestines to create a new bladder. It was such an interesting idea to me and illustrated how innovative and thought-provoking medicine can be.”

“James Behrmann is another student of ours who is poised to make medicine better,” said Jeffrey Boscamp, M.D., the president and dean of HMSOM. “His involvement in AI and other research shows his enterprising nature, which will benefit the field.”

After attending undergrad in Salt Lake City, Utah, James—the youngest of five children—was eager to be near his siblings and parents again. Some of
James’ proudest accomplishments at HMSOM include taking a research project on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and dermatology from the inception of an idea to peer-reviewed publication, with special emphasis on involving students from other cohorts. He also helped organize HMSOM’s very first “Surgical Olympics”—a competition to demonstrate suturing abilities and knowledge judged by surgeons throughout the network.

Read more
Sorini Winner of William Carlos Williams Poetry Competition

Maya J. Sorini, a narrative medicine scholar, essayist, award-winning poet and medical student at our school, has been announced as one of the winners of the 42nd annual William Carlos Williams Poetry Competition!

Sorini earned third place for her poem “Memory Remains Blood Soluble.”

Judges from the Wick Poetry Center at Kent State University evaluated poems submitted by 234 students to select three winning entries, as well as honorable mentions. Sorini and the other two winners will have their poems considered for publication in the Journal of Medical Humanities.

Jamie Mcilvaine and Tony Varughese Tie the Knot!

Best wishes for a happy and healthy life together to Jamie Mcilvaine and Tony Varughese! From our inaugural medical school class, they were married at the end of March! We believe this is the first wedding between two of our students!
Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill Visits HMSOM

We were pleased to welcome Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill (NJ-11), who recently toured the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine (HMSOM) to learn more about the mission to provide students with a medical education that is both innovative and deeply connected to the community surrounding the school. Rep. Sherrill met with Robert C. Garrett, CEO of Hackensack Meridian Health, Dr. Jeffrey Boscamp, president and dean, Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine, as well as first year medical students.

VERY EARLY Admissions Interview Dry Runs

For the second year in a row, HMSOM delivered the 2024 Paterson Science Symposium! Each of the 35 high school students from Paterson STEM schools presented their year-long research projects.