

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Medical students learn how to create change

While completing medical school, many students in Alberta also work to create positive change in their communities through advocacy projects and leadership positions. Students at the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta had the opportunity to present their work at the annual Advocacy Symposiums held on February 11 in Edmonton and February 13 in Calgary. For the first time, the symposiums were a joint venture between the Alberta Medical Association and Canadian Medical Association. The top three winners from each university also had the new opportunity to present their incredible work at the spring Representative Forum in Calgary.

Students at both events also had the honor of hearing keynote speeches from AMA President, Dr. Alison Clarke and CMA President, Dr. Gigi Osler. Dr. Clarke spoke about the importance of making a personal connection in her advocacy work and reinforced the positive impact that students can have. Dr. Osler spoke about the future directions of medicine: advocating for diversity, physician wellness and the role of technology in health care.

In Calgary, the poster presentations included advocacy work with diverse populations including Indigenous Peoples and newcomers to Canada, programs to support students through trauma-informed care teaching, creating podcasts for students, and evaluating student-focused programs. Angela Kim won her category with: *The attitudes and competencies of Canadian medical students in fulfilling the CanMEDS health advocate role*. After finding that students are less aware of the definition and of how being a health advocate is evaluated in medical school, Angela ran a didactic training session on the components of this role to support students in their health advocacy learning and development. At the Representative Forum, Wendy Wang and Braeden Newton presented their poster *An assessment of the physical accessibility of the Foothills Hospital campus* that identified and described how inaccessible spaces in students' daily environment impact their learning and the accessibility of the medical profession.

In the three-minute thesis category, Emily Cooley, Harneet Chahal and Dr. Ian Mitchell won with *Ethical action and community water fluoridation*, which is the starting point for their work creating publicly accessible health documents that support water fluoridation re-instatement. Alex Smith also presented his work *Davie Buyers Club: Trail blazing access to HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis in Canada*. Before HIV PrEP was widely available, Alex created the Davie Buyers Club that included online educational resources to guide Canadians without drug insurance coverage on how they can safely and cost effectively access this medication. The website had over 18,000 unique visitors and helped approximately 300 people access PrEP medications before they were available on provincial formularies.

In Edmonton, the students had a chance to have individual mentoring sessions with nine physician mentors including the presidents of the AMA, CMA and Alberta Health

Services, CEO, Verna Yiu. The students learned more about the mentors' journeys and current initiatives and were able to seek advice about how to get more involved with advocacy projects.

There were numerous poster presentations on impactful advocacy projects. One of the winners, Chu Yang Lin, presented about *Street Sense*, a new harm-reduction approach to educating youth about the dangers (and sometimes benefits) of drugs. Brandon Zhao, another winner, presented about the *Indigenous Health Elective*, a new part of the medical school curriculum that he is leading. This elective is designed to increase awareness about Indigenous Peoples, the health care disparities they encounter, and solutions to these challenges. The third winner, Ines Zuna, presented about *MD Aide*, a project that created a free preparatory MCAT course for students from low-income backgrounds applying to study medicine. The projects that these impressive students are leading are designed to help those who are vulnerable. Given that this is one of the goals of the AMA, it was especially fitting that they presented at the Advocacy Symposiums.

On behalf of the U of A and U of C student organizing committees, we would like to thank the AMA, CMA and the participating physicians across the province for their support and time to help students learn and to reach their advocacy potential.