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Legacy SFA Program Application for Physicians and Dentists Due Soon!

**Deadline: May 15, 2024**

Email Giselle Bermudez at gbermudez@delamed.org with any questions.

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**The Khanversation**

My patient (who knows my mother) walks in to see her at her home business.

Patient: “So, I saw your son the other day in the office” [my clinic].

My mother, working: “Oh, that’s nice.”

[My father, chiming in unprompted] : “well, at least you get to see him now and then”.

Patient: “So he’s a pretty important person it seems”. [don’t worry, this isn’t a compliment as you’ll see].

Mom, half-listening: “mm hmm, I guess so”.

Patient: “yeah, so important I had to wait like 15 minutes for my appointment when I got there”.

Patients don’t care how important we are and they shouldn’t. They want to be taken care of, to receive compassionate, timely care, and to feel better.
Similar to cars. The truth doesn’t care about your feelings, and neither does your old sports car with lightly rusty but quite sharp bits.

It’s a reminder that honesty is important. Like admitting you don’t know what you’re doing when you’ve got a steering rack partially disassembled. And then figuring it out.

Necessity may be the mother of invention, but poverty and lack of a good nearby mechanic are the father of making do. When you’ve accidentally had windshield washer fluid poured into a coolant tank and you have to drain the radiator. When never having drained a radiator before. Also a good time to ponder why both fluids are green in color, and thus prone to error. Or when your spark plug wire comes loose on a highway and your car sputters to a coma, but mercifully in a parking lot. And you wonder why cars have spark plugs or wires any longer at all.

Thus comes the next step in the “recovering mechanic (or doctor)” program: engagement. No, not the type with rings (unless they’re piston rings!), but the involvement kind. You see, problems whether major or minor create opportunities. Late patient? Let’s figure out the root causes and address the issue. “Dr. Khan, your patient is late” may not be due just to an inefficient check-in process, or the patient neglecting to be on time (although this happens to all of us; touch of grace helpful there!). In my experience, it’s usually due to ‘life stuff’.

We now call this stuff the social determinants of health. A single parent heading to my practice may first have to prepare meals for their young child, get them to school, ensure their house is locked up in an insecure neighborhood, find a bus on a rainy day, hope it’s on time, field last minute calls from a daycare/school/aging relative, hope no crises are happening with a home in need of repair, and then finally, maybe, make it to the clinic in time for a 20-minute appointment- hoping that I’m also on time so they can get out of there in time to deal with more life stuff.

It’s not a surprise they’re a few minutes late; it’s a wonder they made it here at all. And yet—there are more patients waiting. There’s a lot going on. There’s always a lot going on.

How do we begin to address this? Perhaps by stepping back and addressing the causes of the causes. As readers are well aware, we are not only the Delaware Academy of Medicine, we are also the state’s Public Health Association. These disciplines are complementary; medicine is simply the action arm of public health; the shiny tip of a very long spear which focuses on those social determinants our patients face outside the clinic. Which, according to research, is where 80% of health issues are influenced.

So do we ever get ‘outside’? The medical profession has been draped in protective white coats perhaps a bit too long, and so younger physicians are recognizing rapidly that having one’s voice heard by legislators and other elected officials is critical to addressing these key issues. As the saying goes, if you don’t do politics, politics is going to do you.

What does engagement look like? A good start is identifying injustice in the area of our community’s health. There should currently be no shortage of that, locally or globally. An important example: death by violence and war. The US is the only developed country where the #1 cause of children dying in our country is a bullet. This is shocking on many levels, not least because it’s unnecessary and preventable everywhere else in the world. Our violence policies go beyond as well, to the global scale: our tax dollars fund war and violence abroad, on a nearly unimaginable scale. The benefit of working in medicine and public health is that it provides us a way to take pretty easy moral stands such as ‘don’t kill children’. ‘Don’t defund health care’. ‘Do take care of the poor and refugees’. One could argue that if we have trouble with such a stand outside the clinic, we shouldn’t be surprised when the 20% we control inside the clinic isn’t all that effective.

One doesn’t have to go far to see opportunities for engagement. Our state legislature in Dover is less than an hour’s drive from most part of the state. Among all the good work our colleagues are doing, there are other initiatives we might want to take stand on. Such as ones which purport to control healthcare costs through draconian control measures on our health systems. Or absent measures, that continue to not take a stand against violence, both locally and globally. Or fail to advocate for the measures we know work for improved health of Delawareans: universal health care, an increased focus on social spending and not just medical expenses. Small states like ours could band together with other small
states (e.g., in ways we already do for research) to focus on health policy. Many of our
issues are in federal control, such as price caps on pharmaceuticals, bringing renewed
focus to gun control policy, eliminating violence exportation through arms sales, or finally
admitting that the grand experiment in market-based, commercialized healthcare has
simply led to more middlemen, more bills, and more barriers between health care providers
and the patients we serve.

Everyone has tried to optimize how they play the game, but our patients and communities,
local and global, are the pawns. So ‘enough’ means engagement. It means conversations.
It means letters. It might mean a protest or three. It means showing up for what you believe
in. Because if you don’t, no one shows up for you either. And yes, that applies to all
aspects of one’s life.

Sometimes engagement may be necessary to move forward in a literal sense. Ever tried to
get a manual transmission car going without using both your feet? Not going to happen.
This of course also leads to gratitude. At not having to replace a radiator or engine block.
Or realize something truly catastrophic (the transmission; it’s always the transmission) has
failed and you have precisely one gear to limp home on.

Or simply that despite our foibles and imperfections, our lapses of knowledge and of
imperfect behavior, our running late in clinic and of not always showing up for those people
or causes we care about, that we are incredibly lucky to be in a profession where patients
trust us, and we can make a difference. We are lucky to be alive and have a voice. We are
lucky to have others extend us grace and we are lucky to know fine people.

Remember the starfish story? A mom was walking with her daughter on a beach where
hundreds of starfish had washed ashore. As the mom picked one up and placed it back in
the water, the daughter asked ‘but there are so many.. what difference did that make?’ and
the mom replied, ‘it made a difference to that one’. We might not be able to fix everything
for everyone, but we can make a difference for the ones we come across.

Wishing you a happy spring, and reminding you as always to Drive On!

Omar Khan, MD, MHS, FAAFP
Editor in Chief, Delaware Journal of Public Health
Chair, Advisory Council, Delaware Public Health Association
delamed.org| djph.org

DE Mini Medical School- North
April 10th to May 15th
Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m.
Designed for individuals who want to gain a deeper understanding of the world of medicine, Delaware Mini-Medical School is a free, six-week series. This series is designed for middle, junior, high school, and undergraduate students, though all are welcome to attend. (Parents, attend with your children!) Attendees learn about important trends in diagnosing and treating illness and general health topics. Faculty will provide in-depth lectures and allow time for questions to enhance the experience. There are no tests or grades. No previous medical training is required.

Qualifying participants who attend all six sessions of a series will receive a Signed Certificate of Achievement and become members of the Delaware Mini Medical School Academy. Attendance is taken via zoom login for this purpose. For students who are unable, or do not want to attend all six sessions, a self-signed certificate will be made available at the conclusion of the series.

Register here

Healthcare Student Loan Program

Attention Delaware Residents Pursuing Careers in the Healthcare Field!
Unlock your potential with the Delaware Academy of Medicine’s Student Financial Aid Program!

Don’t let securing a no-interest loan* stand in the way of your goals! Are you passionate about nursing, physician assistant, behavioral health, dental, medical assisting, or other healthcare professions? We have great news for you! The Delaware Academy of Medicine’s SFA program is here to support your dreams and make your education more affordable than ever before.

Interest-free student loans*  
(with a time-limited commitment to work in DE post-graduation based on degree or certification type the loan is financing)

Loan Amount ranges $2,500 to $15,000  
Funds available until depleted

Apply Now!

Become a Member and Stay Connected!
Additional Resources

Delaware Division of Public Health - The DPH Bulletin
Trust for America's Health: Wellness and Prevention Digest - Subscribe

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