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Resident Spotlight: Monica Hessler, PGY-1, Transitional Year (TY) Program
Ascension Providence Rochester Hospital, Rochester

The Gold Humanism Honor Society (GHHS)

RT: Where did you grow up, and when did you first become interested in medicine as a career?

MH: It is truly one of the biggest blessings to have grown up in Traverse City, Michigan. I always refer to it as a “little big town” because it is one of those places where everybody knows everybody, but there are so many amazing opportunities to pursue. My parents worked hard to give me every opportunity to pursue my interests. I had a ton of different pets like hamsters, a chinchilla, a rabbit, two ferrets, dogs, and a horse to keep me very busy! Initially I thought I was interested in becoming a veterinarian because it combined my passion for science and my love for animals, but I soon realized I loved playing with my healthy animals more than treating sick ones. My dad is a family physician, so for as long as I can remember I was immersed in medicine. I remember playing in the storage room of my dad’s clinic trying to figure out how to pronounce all the medication sample names and pretending to be a doctor. When I was an undergrad at Michigan State, I studied biomedical laboratory science. On my summer breaks, I worked in Traverse City in an emergency department as a nurse assistant. I loved being in healthcare and was always talking with the doctors about patient cases and the treatment plans. I knew that going into medicine would combine my love of science and my constant desire to problem solve as well as opportunity to serve my community.

What specialties are you considering? Do you have particular clinical/research interests?

After graduating from WSUSOM in 2021, I decided to pursue Dermatology, and completing a transitional year is one of the requirements prior to matriculating into an advanced specialty. I chose the WSUSOM TY program because I loved my time at WSUSOM, all the residents spoke highly of the program, and I really felt like I connected with faculty during my interview. Next year I will be moving to St. Louis, Missouri to pursue a 2-year Dermatology Clinical Research Fellowship at Saint Louis University. I am really excited about this opportunity and cannot wait to expand my knowledge of dermatology through this fellowship. With regard to research areas, I am especially interested in the rheumatology/dermatology overlap syndromes and autoimmune dermatology.

As a medical student in WSUSOM, you were elected to membership in the Gold Humanism Honor Society (GHHS). Could you tell readers more about GHHS?

GHHS is a national organization that promotes humanistic and compassionate patient-centered care. My involvement with the WSUSOM GHHS chapter was one of my most memorable experiences while in medical school. Getting inducted was a huge honor, and I felt very blessed to be a part of this great institution. To become a member of GHHS, you must be nominated by a peer, a resident, or faculty physician who submits your name along with their reasons why you should be inducted. Then nominees are sent a series of questions, the responses to which are added to the application if they would like to be considered for membership. They must also obtain a letter of recommendation unless they were nominated directly by a faculty member. In the final step, all applications are blinded and scored against a core set of criteria including categories of community service, leadership, compassion, patient advocacy, professionalism, promotion of humanism, and letters of recommendation. The top applicants then become members of GHHS.

I became a member of the WSUSOM chapter's elected Executive Board, for which I served as the webmaster/historian, managing our chapter Instagram account and website, and keeping our member list updated at the national level. Our chapter had many initiatives to increase diversity and inclusion as well as service projects in the Detroit community. My fellow GHHS Executive Board members even spearheaded a project to change our WSUSOM course packs to use patient-centered language.

What's the relation between humanistic approaches to providing clinical care and optimal outcomes for patients, and between such approaches and professionalism?

Humanistic care for patients should be at the forefront of all healthcare providers' decisions. We meet our patients on their worst days, the day that they finally mustered up the courage to come to the doctor to discuss some of their biggest fears. While every patient interaction may not be a positive one, it is our duty as physicians to be professional and provide the best quality of care we can to all patients. I constantly remind myself to be the kind of doctor I dreamed of becoming when I was a little kid, the caring healer I would want for my mom or dad. When we approach patient care with humanism in mind, we see our patients as people, not just the embodiment of a disease state. When physicians provide compassionate care, I believe that the health outcomes are much better. Patients are much more likely to follow recommendations from someone that they feel they can trust to give them sound advice.

Did you have any special role models during your medical training?

My earliest role model was my dad, Dr. Gregory Hessler (WSUSOM Class of 1984). As a family physician, I watched him work tirelessly to serve his patients. He was and still is the doctor who remembers every detail about his patients. He knows medicine like the back of his hand, but what I really hope to emulate is the love he invests in every patient encounter. He doesn't want to put a band aid or give a quick fix, but rather he looks for the root cause and wants to heal from the ground up. During my medical training, many amazing people have helped shape me into the physician I am today: the faculty in the WSU Dermatology Program (Dr. Darius Mehregan, Dr. Steven Daveluy, Dr. Geoffrey

Potts, and the late Dr. Peter Aronson) have been there for me, guided me, and shown so much support throughout my time at WSU, and I am so grateful to them. After working with so many outstanding dermatologists, I knew it was the field I wanted to join! While my mom Margo Hessler isn't in the medical field, she is one my biggest role models in life. She has a servant heart and has supported me wholeheartedly throughout each step of my journey to where I am today. I wouldn't be who I am today without her.

What might you recommend as “best practice” in teaching humanism as a core of GME?

I have learned most about how to provide humanistic care to my patients by emulating amazing physicians with whom I've worked in the past. When I see a patient really connecting with a doctor, I try to take note of those small mannerisms or gestures the physician did to really establish that relationship. I always try to be observant and see the dynamics in all patient/physician encounters, which allows me to incorporate them into my own practices. I would encourage all medical students and residents to watch positive patient interactions closely and seek out ways to connect with patients on a more personal level. In a time when medicine practice is too often about high turnover rates and quick visits, it's crucial to be the one provider who got to know their patient a little more personally, because that might make a world of difference for that individual.

What's the best book you've read recently?

I recently read *You're Stronger Than You Think: The Power to Do What You Feel You Can't* by Dr. Les Parrott. I think it's a great book to read when you're about to start your intern year because all of sudden you find yourself doing things that you sometime don't feel prepared to handle. We have spent so many years studying and working for that moment where we get to be called “Doctor,” yet we often feel unprepared and can feel the weight of imposter syndrome hitting us. This book talks about finding that inner strength you didn't know you had and taking things head on. It really helped me feel more confident in myself and my own abilities.