



RENAISSANCE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AT
STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

Reflection & Safe Spaces





safe space

SRAVYA VARANASI

WHERE DO YOU FIND YOUR PEACE?

IS IT IN THE SMILE OF A FRIEND,
HEAD THROWN BACK WITH LAUGHTER,
AS YOUR SMILE STARTS TO MIRROR THEIRS?

IS IT IN THE SLOW STIR OF A SPOON,
SAVORY WARMTH WAFTING OVER YOUR FACE,
AS YOU CRAFT THE PERFECT DINNER?

IS IT IN THE SOFTNESS OF FUR,
LEGS CROSSED ON A FRAYED RUG,
HAND RUNNING OVER YOUR PET'S BACK?

YOU SHOW KINDNESS TO OTHERS,
ATTENTIVENESS TO OTHERS,
GENTLENESS TO OTHERS.

SO WHY DON'T YOU DESERVE THE SAME?

YOU, WHO FILLS ANOTHER'S DAY WITH JOY,
YOU, WHO GIVES YOUR ALL TO EVERYTHING,
YOU, WHO SHARES YOUR AFFECTION WITH EASE.

IF YOU SHOW YOURSELF THAT SAME KINDNESS,
THAT SAME ATTENTIVENESS,
THAT SAME GENTLENESS,

IF YOU LAUGH WITH YOURSELF,
EMBRACE YOUR SCATTERED THOUGHTS,
LAY A GENTLE HAND ON YOUR HEART,

WILL THE RIVERS STOP RUNNING,
THE BUILDINGS START CRUMBLING,
THE WORLD STOP TURNING?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU MAY FIND?

THE SUN WILL GROW BRIGHTER,
THE BREEZE SOFTER,
THE CLOUDS LIGHTER.

YOUR SMILE WILL GROW WIDER,
YOUR MIND STILLER,
YOUR HEART WARMER.

Acknowledging Differences

RIYA GANDHI

We, as future physicians, have a responsibility to each other and to our patients to address inequities in and outside of the healthcare system. Race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and socioeconomic status all contribute to health outcomes. Rather than denying these contributions, self-reflection with the following questions can not only help confront personal biases, but also help understand the role of the social determinants of health. Furthermore, taking on a culturally sensitive perspective can help us create a safe and inclusive environment for patients and fellow colleagues. Take a few minutes to read them over:

1. What other knowledge, skills and resources would help me to work from a more culturally inclusive perspective?
2. What do I know about the cultural, linguistic, and religious and education background of my peers and patients?
3. How could I learn more about the diversity of my patients and colleagues?
4. How do I respond to my students (emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally) based on these perceptions?
5. What experience do I have because of living, studying or working in culturally and linguistically diverse cultures? How can I draw from, or further expand upon these experiences?
6. What is my definition of “diversity”?
7. What are the national, cultural, linguistic, or religious and educational backgrounds of my patients and peers?
8. What are my perceptions/assumptions of patients and peers from diverse cultural groups? Or with language and dialects different from mine? Or with disabilities?
9. How do I adapt my practices to be more responsive to the unique needs of diverse patients and peers?
10. What are the sources of these perceptions (e.g., friends/relatives, media, stereotypes, past perceptions)?

Student Spotlight

MEET HANNA LASUGAS, MS2

Past: Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like growing up in your shoes? Where are you from? What influenced your journey into medicine?

I had the privilege of growing up in the Caribbean pocket of Queens, Ozone Park. There was no shortage of lively music coming from people's backyards, and delicious meals wafting from neighbor's windows. My father, an immigrant from Guyana, and my mother, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, moved here with dreams of giving their children a better life experience than they had. I grew up in a faith-based family, full of pastors and leaders who constantly worked for the betterment of my community. My main role model, my father, sought to improve educational literacy, financial literacy, and many more issues in my community. While he and my other family members worked on those issues, my heart grew for the parts of my community that lacked equitable healthcare. The more I learned about inequity in medicine, the more passionate I became about wanting to be a part of the change that needs to happen in Western Medicine.

Present: How has medical school been for you so far? What do you do outside of medical school (hobbies, favorite people, etc.)?

Medical school has been my biggest struggle, but I feel so blessed to even say that sentence. Every day I think about how the perseverance of my ancestors has brought me to this point, and that fuels me to keep on going. Outside of medical school, I love to laugh. Whether it be with my husband, my friends, or at memes on Instagram, laughing is one of my top hobbies.



Aside from that, I love going to the gym, cuddling with my cats, and going shopping!

Future: What's next for you? Do you know what you'd like to specialize in? How do you see yourself practicing medicine and contributing to your community in the future?

Right now, I'm concerned about improving health outcomes for patients of color. Knowing that Black and Indigenous women are 2-3 times more likely than white women to die from complications of pregnancy and birth, is a haunting statistic. And I could go on, delivering haunting statistics about what health care outcomes look like for disadvantaged groups in America.

I want to go into OBGYN and restore the trust that women of color have in medicine. In NYC, my home, the pregnancy-related mortality ratio for Black women is more than nine times that for White women. Lack of cultural competency, overwhelming unconscious biases, and just blatant racism are costing women of color their lives. I hope to be the kind of doctor that can change these outcomes and influences my colleagues to be a part of this change as well.

As Advocacy Chair for the Class of 2026, how are you 'creating safe spaces for open dialogue' (the theme for this newsletter) both in your life and amongst your colleagues?

There are probably many ways this topic can be approached. I believe that having a desire to understand other people is the foundation of creating a safe space for dialogue.

Dialogue implies two or more people talking with each other and listening to each other.

Talking is easy. Listening to a point of view that you don't agree with, that is a lot harder. Yet, if we do not listen with intention, we will not be able to understand each other. And why should I expect someone to listen to what I have to say, if I do not take the time to listen to them first? Open spaces for dialogue require people to put their pride aside, to abandon thoughts of wanting to be right, and even wanting to change other people. If we focus all our energy into trying to change another person's perspective on the spot, we may find ourselves in a frustrated argument, rather than a safe space for the giving and sharing of ideas.

In my life and amongst my colleagues, I have found the safest spaces for dialogue to be the ones where I did most of the listening and committed to trying to understand that person's point of view.

Any messages you would like to share with the medical community right now?

If equitable care for all is truly our goal, we have a long way to go. However, we must not give up hope. In remembering that change starts with ourselves, we must be in a constant state of growth. We must find the strength to challenge our everyday thoughts, unearth our unconscious biases (which we ALL have), and allow our patients to be our teachers.

Mindfulness Practice

As medical students, we came into this profession with ideals of helping others, yet we often forget about the first patient we should be prioritizing: ourselves. In the onslaught of information and expectations, we minimize and trade our mental wellbeing for an assurance that we have mastered the content just enough to get by. In a sense, medical school is like a pressure cooker, and when things perhaps do not go as planned, it can feel utterly debilitating.

Now more than ever, we need to be kind to ourselves. As we learn how to extend our compassion to our patients, we must also extend this practice onto ourselves. In this issue, we want to share with you a healthier way to deal with stressful situations, whether that be studying for an upcoming exam, performing well on rotations, or doing your best for your patients.



PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF

PHOTO BY FINN ON UNSPLASH

Self-Compassion Break

1. Close your eyes and think of a situation in your life that is causing you stress.
2. Bring that situation into your awareness: what happened, or what do you think will happen?
3. Pay attention to your body: do you feel any stress and emotional discomfort anywhere? Where?
4. Now, say to yourself:
 - a. "This is a moment of suffering." and "Suffering is a part of life. I am not alone in this."
 - b. Acknowledge how you feel. Acknowledge our common humanity. What we are going through, and how we choose to go through this experience does not make us abnormal or deficient in any way.
5. Put your hands over your heart. Feel the warmth under your fingertips, and the gentleness of your embrace on the rest of your body.
6. Think for a second: what do you need to hear the most right now?
 - a. "May I be kind to myself."
 - b. "May I give myself the compassion I need."
 - c. "May I accept myself as I am."
 - d. "May I learn to accept myself as I am."
 - e. "May I forgive myself."
 - f. "May I be strong."
 - g. "May I be patient."
 - h. "May I be give myself the grace that I need to endure and survive."
7. Breathe in and out. Open your eyes.

Resources for Students

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (STONY BROOK AND WINTHROP CLINICAL CAMPUSES)

(631) 632-6720 (main CAPS number)

<http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/caps/index.html>

- West Campus Office:
 - Student Health Services- 2nd Floor
 - 1 Stadium Drive Stony Brook, NY 11794-3100
 - Can call ahead OR just walk in
- East Campus Office:
 - Health Sciences Center-3rd Floor
 - By appointment only
- CAPS After Hours (speak to a licensed mental health counselor 24/7 familiar with the campus community and local resources) (631) 632-6720; press 2 if calling after business hours to speak with a counselor OR (855) 509-5742 DIRECT PHONE ACCESS to CAPS After Hours

PEER COUNSELING BY TRAINED MEDICAL STUDENTS. CURRENTLY MULTIPLE COUNSELORS AVAILABLE.

- Contact either Yu Wang Yu.Wang.3@stonybrookmedicine.edu or Michelle Locolano Michelle.locolano@stonybrookmedicine.edu, both in the class of 2020

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE

- 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
- National network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

RESPONSE OF SUFFOLK COUNTY

- (631) 751-7500
- <https://www.responsecrisiscenter.org>
- (also has link to Hear2Help, crisis support via mobile texting device; available Monday-Friday from 7pm-11pm)
- 24/7 crisis intervention/suicide prevention hotline in Suffolk County providing telephone support as well as referrals for support groups, clinicians, mental health clinics, and other community programs and services.

Resources for Students

PHYSICIAN AND MEDICAL STUDENT DEPRESSION RESOURCE:

- [HTTPS://AFSP.ORG/OUR-WORK/EDUCATION/PHYSICIAN-MEDICAL-STUDENT-DEPRESSION-SUICIDE-PREVENTION/](https://afsp.org/our-work/education/physician-medical-student-depression-suicide-prevention/)
- INFORMATION PAGE WITH EDUCATIONAL FACTS AND RESOURCES SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH AMONG PHYSICIANS, RESIDENTS, AND MEDICAL STUDENTS.

OMBUDS OFFICE

- A RESOURCE FOR STUDENTS THAT INVOLVE MEETING WITH A DESIGNATED NEUTRAL THIRD PARTY THAT OFFERS CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PROBLEM SOLVING AT AN INFORMAL LEVEL. CONFIDENTIAL – NO PROBLEM IS TOO BIG OR SMALL TO SHARE WITH AN OMBUDS REPRESENTATIVE!
- [HTTPS://WWW.STONYBROOK.EDU/COMMCMS/OMBUDS/PDFS/OMBUDS%20ORIENTATION%20.PDF](https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/ombuds/pdfs/ombuds%20orientation%20.pdf)

CENTER FOR PREVENTION AND OUTREACH

- (TELEHEALTH THERAPY, ADVOCACY GROUPS, FREE HEALTHCARE PRODUCTS, STD TESTING)
- OFFERS A VARIETY OF SERVICES INVOLVING PREVENTION – SPECIFICALLY TIMELY CARE – A TELEHEALTH PLATFORM THAT PROVIDES 24/7 VIRTUAL ACCESS TO MEDICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

CRUNCH FITNESS OF LAKE GROVE

- (3174 MIDDLE COUNTRY RD, LAKE GROVE, NY 11755) OFFERS A MEDICAL STUDENT DISCOUNT IF YOU SHOW THEM YOUR ID.
- THIS IS A GREAT PLACE TO WORKOUT – CLASSES, FREE WEIGHTS, CARDI, SAUNA – AND MANY STONYBROOK MEDICAL STUDENTS ATTEND! IT HAS BECOME A GREAT PLACE OF COMMUNITY FOR DECOMPRESSING BETWEEN THE STRESS OF EXAMS. SHOW YOUR ID AT CHECK IN AND THEY WILL PROVIDE A DISCOUNTED RATE. PHYSICAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH ARE INTERCONNECTED -- MAKING SURE OUR MEDICAL STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO MOVE THEIR BODIES DAILY CAN BUFFER SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT!

Questions, Comments, or Creative contributions?

Please reach out to our editors:

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