

## Reflections



Photo by Krisha Mehta

## Student Spotlights:

### Leah Ibrahim Puri, MS4



Leah pictured holding Bean at brunch in Manhattan

*Your past: Where did you grow up? Did you always know the medical field was for you?*

I grew up in Abuja, Nigeria and moved to the U.S. for college. I was good at Biology growing up so my teachers encouraged me to pursue medicine. I really leaned into pursuing medicine when I

witnessed lack of healthcare access devastate members of my family and community. I felt a sense of duty to the various communities I am a part of and that solidified my commitment to medicine when I was 14 years old.

***Your present: What do you do for fun? What are your hobbies?***

I love to read, listen to R&B and write poetry! I also unapologetically love a good TV show binge. I've recently picked up video games and an unanticipated interest in Formula 1 (s/o Lewis Hamilton). I enjoy solitude and organizing my thoughts in the quiet but also dancing and screaming to Afrobeats with my friends. Honestly? I could do about anything for fun when I'm with my people.

***Your reflection practices: What role does reflection play in your personal and professional growth? Is there any specific process you engage in for reflection?***

Reflection has been especially instrumental as I navigate a new position of power/privilege in provider-patient relationships. I think it's important to approach reflection as systematic and goal-oriented to some extent or it could easily become ruminating/ overthinking. When I approach professional reflection, I use prompts. It helps me evaluate my role in each encounter, mistakes, missed opportunities for connection and things done well. For me, reflection isn't solely internal, I often rely on external data points (e.g., feedback from an attending, reading articles on trauma informed care) to inform behavioral changes. On a personal level, it helps me situate myself and my role in relationships and pushes me to be a better kid, sibling, friend, partner and colleague. In both cases, it prepares me to better advocate for myself and others.

***Your future: What are you looking forward to in the year/years to come? Do you know what specialty you want to pursue?***

I really just want to be a physician that my Black, African and queer communities can be proud of. I'm currently most drawn to sexual health and gender affirming care and hope to be pursuing these in some capacity. I'm passionate about racial/ SES disparity ethics and envision engaging more with these as both student and teacher. I'm also really looking forward to life slowing down enough for me to learn the violin, write many poems and enjoy the company of my loved ones.

***Any words of advice to other medical students?***

Medical school is especially tough because the education goes far beyond medical knowledge. Good medicine happens when you drop your defenses and open yourself to extra-curricular learning. It is uncomfortable, often painful but well beyond worth it. You are far more than your grades. You deserve to be here. Take care of your community, and then take care of you, too.

## Christina Mazza, MS2



One of my favorite summer days exploring Lloyd Harbor with my best friend, and stopping to visit this very nice rock.

*Your past: Where did you grow up? Did you always know the medical field was for you?*

I have lived on Long Island my whole life, and I was actually born in Stony Brook Hospital! Growing up, I wanted to go into forensics or be a medical examiner because I was obsessed with the TV show, Bones. The medical field came into clearer view my sophomore year of college after doing some mission work and getting really involved in community outreach and service. This helped me to realize my role in wanting to heal others and have meaningful connections with people, while also still serving the community- hence the quest for medical school began!

*Your present: What do you do for fun? What are your hobbies?*

I spend a lot of my free time with friends in the area, going on fun day trips and exploring the island. I love working on my spirituality so I engage in many prayer and meditation practices/groups throughout the week, and attend mass every Sunday with my best friend. I am really involved as a volunteer at a non-profit called the Community Growth Center which offers

mental health services, support groups, and nutritious meals at no cost to the community. I also enjoy going to the gym, hiking, playing piano, and writing poetry!

Your reflection practices: What role does reflection play in your personal and professional growth? Is there any specific process you engage in for reflection?

Spending time in reflection has become an essential practice for me, equivalent to sleeping, or even drinking enough water, because without it, I feel completely different. The primary ways I reflect are through prayer and meditation, which give me the time and space to make room for what I am feeling and process difficult moments. My spiritual and therapeutic journey is grounded in reflection, and cultivating my life based on self-love and acceptance, rather than judgement or expectation. Reflection has allowed me to see myself as a whole person, not defined by accolades or occupations, but by the person that is within. Connecting to that through silent meditation, journaling, poetry, or other practices helps to open my heart and bring my mind peace and clarity.

*Your future: What are you looking forward to in the year/years to come? Do you know what specialty you want to pursue?*

I am really excited to see how I will grow and take the experiences that I've had and lessons I've learned to build a future authentic for me. I am looking forward to walking this journey with the friends, family, and community that have supported me, and further create and cultivate future relationships. I am really interested in Family Medicine and helping individuals access resources in the community, as well as make lifestyle decisions that suit their needs. However, I cannot commit to a specialty for sure! I honestly cannot wait to start talking to patients and getting to know their stories on the floors, and taking some breaks away from my overburdened spacebar on my MacBook Pro.

*Any words of advice to other medical students?*

Take some time and listen to your heart, to understand what you want and where you are hurting or struggling. Give yourself time to be a person outside of all the medicine and find some gratitude in the midst of every day. It's really difficult to balance, but giving yourself at least a moment a day to reflect and feel will really help in the obstacles ahead! :)

## Reflections

Reflection is the conscious process of active thinking and careful consideration of actions, thoughts, and knowledge in order to promote further conclusions. Reflection opens the door to lifelong learning, the precious mantra of the medical field. The incorporation of reflection into our medical school journey can be impactful for ourselves and those around us. While reflection is often thought to be an individual and personal process, this is not always the case. Nonetheless, self-reflection can be vital for correcting beliefs and redirecting misinterpretations, leading to improved interactions with peers, patients, family, and friends. However, reflection is more than just self-directed. Learning how to take feedback from peers and patients is just as much part of the self-reflective process as is considering our own understanding and beliefs. Especially in undergraduate medical education, the process of reflection can be important for achieving therapeutic relationships with patients. Some medical schools have incorporated formal electives funded by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) to integrate mind-body medicine programs into undergraduate medical education. Self-awareness, self-care, and self-reflection are all components of this training. In addition to self-reflection, small group reflections can be just as impactful in our training. By taking the opportunity to listen to others' experiences, you can both provide insight based on your own beliefs and consider the groups' responses to a situation. In any group reflection, it is important to first establish a safe environment that encourages people to think, speak, and share. The goal of these team reflections can lead to action or simple associations and clarity of a given situation. The process of reflection is constantly evolving and unique for each individual. Some ways to incorporate reflection in our journey through medical school include 1) setting aside time to reflect, 2) parsing out your own thoughts and beliefs from those of others, 3) asking yourself questions, 4) acknowledging your feelings, 5) applying your insight in action.

### References:

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### A Written Reflection

Get a paper and pen  
Clear at least 10 minutes from your schedule and put your phone out of your sight.

Unstructured: Start writing whatever comes to your mind, and write freely, without worrying too much about the content.

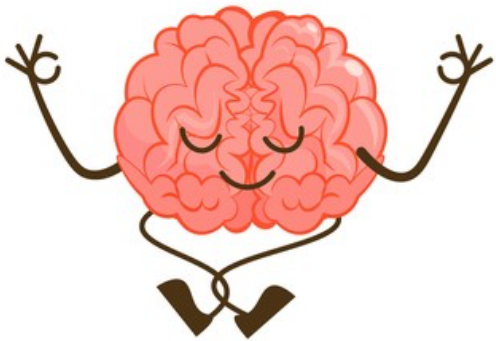
Structured: Choose an experience you had. It could be recent or it could be distant.

First just reflect - Reflect on your expectations, how you approached it, and what parts you found easy or hard about the experience. Write down the thoughts that come to mind.

Second, focus on what you learned: Think about how your knowledge/understanding changed, and what would you do differently if faced with a similar situation. Write down the thoughts that come to mind.

Third, think about how you would use what you learned in the future: Reflect on how you can put your learning into practice and what challenges you might face that may require using this knowledge.

Either way, see what you come out of the exercise thinking or feeling. Hopefully, you will find that this is a good break from your day, one that leaves you recharged, refueled, and with a slightly different mindset.



Thank you for reading!

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