

2019-2020

ISSUE 12.3

MATCH DAY AT A DISTANCE



IVF BABY COMES FULL CIRCLE

EVMS

MAGAZINE

Street Health

*A meaningful
way for students
to learn and serve*



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DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE**

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A meaningful way for students to learn and serve

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In January, when we began planning this issue of EVMS Magazine, the term COVID-19 had yet to be coined. By the time the stories were drafted and being designed in March, the world was deep in the throes of the pandemic.

As a result, we did not print and mail this magazine, lest traces of the coronavirus linger on its pages. Instead, we are delivering it to you via this PDF, as well as our usual digital version with bonus content.

Not only that, but much of what we showcased in this edition has changed dramatically. Street Health, a community-engaged learning program featured in our cover story, had to be paused. Our annual Match Day celebration, when graduating MD students learn of their residency matches, was turned into a drive-thru event. An article about our thriving Summer Scholars program was pulled and held for next year because this year's program was suspended.

Perhaps most daunting was transforming our traditional commencement ceremony into an joyful online event, one that proclaimed the celebratory spirit of our graduates' remarkable achievements. While disappointed to be physically apart from each other on such a momentous occasion, we could not be more proud of our graduates and what they have accomplished.

Some of them will, no doubt, go on to groundbreaking pursuits — like the one that enabled Phillip Connell to forge a lifelong connection with the Jones Institute for Reproductive Medicine, as you will learn in this issue.

What else have we learned in this strange new world? That our faculty and staff are adaptable and resilient. That our experts are vital to keeping the public informed. That our students and residents each have a heart to help whenever and wherever they can. And that the community we serve remains steadfast in its support of healthcare workers, from making masks and donating PPE to delivering meals and abiding by stay-at-home guidance.

The world is different, to be sure. But EVMS is still here, still strong, and still with you, striving to create a healthier future for us all. Thank you for standing with us.

Sincerely,

Richard V. Homan, MD

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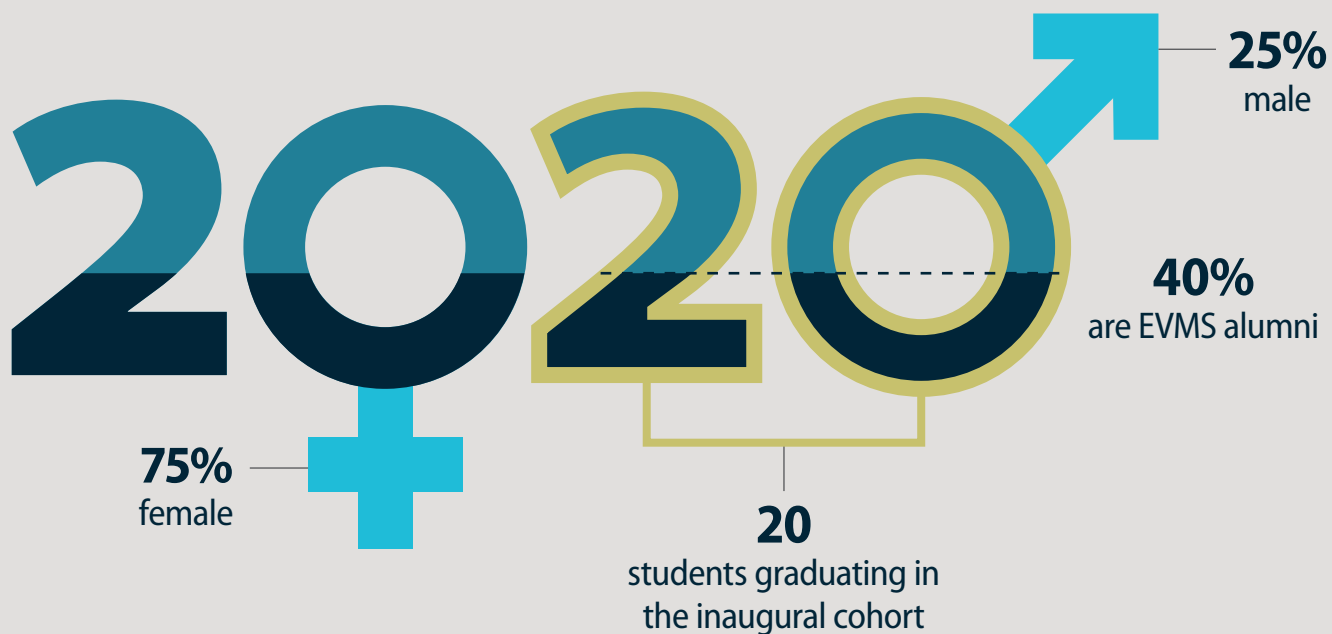
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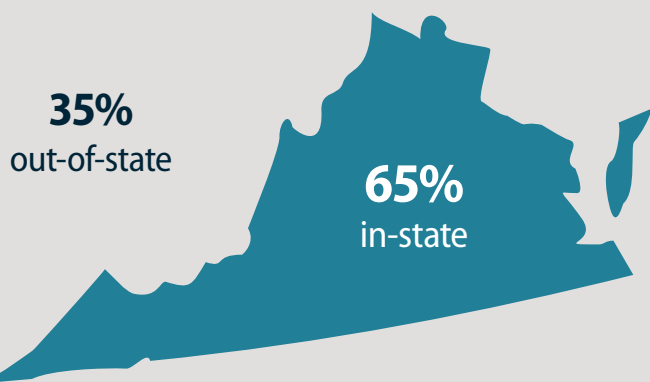
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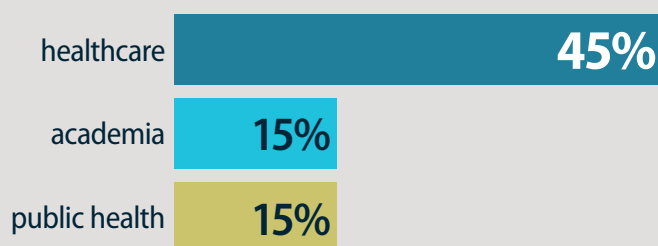
A by-the-numbers look at the first graduating cohort.



WHERE ARE THEY FROM?



WHERE DO THEY WORK?





Dr. Dobrian, right, and Lab Assistant Sezgi Arpag-Macintosh prepare samples to be viewed in a super-resolution microscope to study how the tiny vesicles interact with cells. They then use an imaging flow cytometer to help them separate and analyze each component.

Cellular sleuth pursues tiny prey for huge benefits

Imagine a large city with a network of highways, each road bustling with motorists streaming in all directions. Now, imagine that your job is to track each vehicle, discern its cargo, determine which drivers are up to no good and then stop them before they do any harm.

Sound difficult? That's essentially the task facing scientist Anca Dobrian, PhD, Professor of Physiological Sciences and Master Educator in the Fine Family Academy of Educators at EVMS. But instead of trucks or cars, Dr. Dobrian's prey are tiny biological elements known as extracellular vesicles. And rather than searching on highways, her pursuit takes place in the human body.

For decades, these vesicles that circulate outside cells were discounted as little more than cellular trash collectors. But recent discoveries demonstrate that extracellular vesicles actually are vital cogs in a complex communications machinery — shuttling messages and biological cargo between cells throughout the body.

Understanding how they work could be the key to unlocking treatments for a range of diseases.

"At any one time there are trillions of them circulating in the body," Dr. Dobrian says. "They have been found in all the body fluids from tears to sweat to urine to blood."

Dr. Dobrian's cellular detective work has long focused on

finding a way to prevent the unhealthy side effects of obesity — among them diabetes and heart and vascular disease. More recently, her studies have broadened to include liver disease and prostate cancer.

And with each disease she adds to her research, Dr. Dobrian has come to believe that vesicles play an important role.

Her recently published research shows that vesicles can carry troublesome inflammatory signatures from dysfunctional to healthy cells and can slow down their metabolism. They also can damage cells by preventing blood vessels from growing and carrying needed oxygen and nutrients to the tissues.

"If the vesicles are damaging, how can we prevent their uptake by the tissue?" she asks. "To do that, we have to understand the mechanism by which they are taken up, and then maybe we can control and inhibit that process."

"I'm hoping there is something in common that explains the unhealthy side effects of obesity," she says. "And I'm hoping that by looking at these cellular messengers, we can understand that commonality."

If her detective work pays off, understanding those commonalities might help take harmful vesicles off the cellular highway. □



A physician's
diabetes diagnosis
as a child sparked a lifelong
hobby — and his career

Location courtesy of Local Heroes in Ghent.

On campus, David Lieb, MD, is Associate Professor of Internal Medicine, Director of the EVMS Endocrinology Fellowship Program and patient care provider with EVMS Medical Group's Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders practice. Off campus, Dr. Lieb is a serious collector and reader of comic books.

When did you start collecting comic books and why?

I started reading comic books in elementary school. I loved Archie comics, Disney comics like Uncle Scrooge, and Garfield — the same stuff that my three boys read now. But I really started collecting comics when I was in middle school. I was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes the summer I turned 12 and couldn't go to camp that year — so I had a lot of time to read! That, and the Tim Burton "Batman" movie came out, and all of my friends were into it.

How many comic books do you have? Do you collect any specific kinds?

I probably have between 5,000 and 10,000 individual comics, along with collected editions and graphic novels. My interests have changed over time from superhero books to slice-of-life comics to crime/noir comics. That's one of the reasons I love

comic books so much. They truly cover every genre: fiction and nonfiction, memoir and fantasy. I love comics from the silver and bronze ages of comics — the '60s and '70s — especially Marvel comics.

Are any of them valuable? Are you on the hunt for any special ones?

I don't have too many super-valuable comics. As a kid from the '80s and '90s, I have a few popular books from that era. My first appearance of Deadpool is worth something. Most of the older books I have are "reader copies." They may not be in the best condition, but I can read and enjoy them. Some collectors put their books in hard plastic containers and have them professionally graded. That's never been my thing. I like to hold them and read them.



"I have comics that have moved me to tears and comics that have shown me what it's like to live in someone else's shoes. They're not all superheroes."

Do you have a favorite character? What else should we know about your collection?

When I was a kid, my favorite characters were Spider-Man and Batman. I couldn't get enough of them. Now I'll often get into a particular writer or artist and then collect a lot of their work rather than focus on one character. One of my favorite creators is Jack Kirby, the "King of Comics." Kirby created or co-created almost every major Marvel character, including Captain America, Thor, the Hulk, the Fantastic Four, the Eternals — you name it. He went on to create a series at rival DC comics called the Fourth World with characters that include Orion and Darkseid. It's a shame he didn't live to see all of his creations on the big screen. I have two comics signed by Jack. They are two of my most prized possessions.

What are the most common misconceptions about comic books and/or their collectors?

The "Comic Book Guy" from the Simpsons comes to mind. And of course, that guy does exist. But everyone reads comics: kids, adults, girls, boys, women, men, and they are international and cover every

genre. I have comics that have moved me to tears and comics that have shown me what it's like to live in someone else's shoes. They're not all superheroes.

You've been with EVMS for more than 10 years now. What keeps you here?

I love the people at EVMS. From my patients to my colleagues across the school to the medical students, residents and fellows — it's the people I get to work with who mean the most to me. EVMS is special. It's small enough that I had significant career opportunities I would not have had at other institutions, but large enough that I've found wonderful people to collaborate with on so many projects over the years. I also love Norfolk, and it doesn't hurt that we have the world's best comic shop less than a mile from my house — shout out to Local Heroes in Ghent!

What are you most passionate about in your work at EVMS?

My professional passions are patient-care clinical education. It's my patients and our endocrinology fellows that keep me smiling at work every day. □



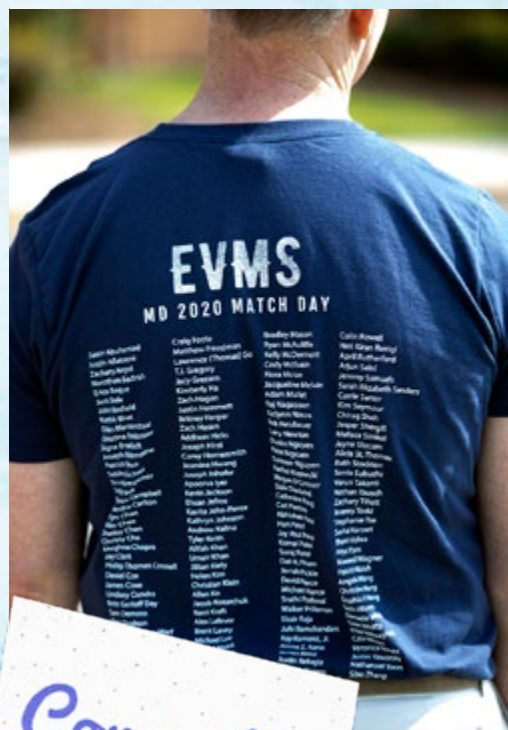
MATCH DAY 2020

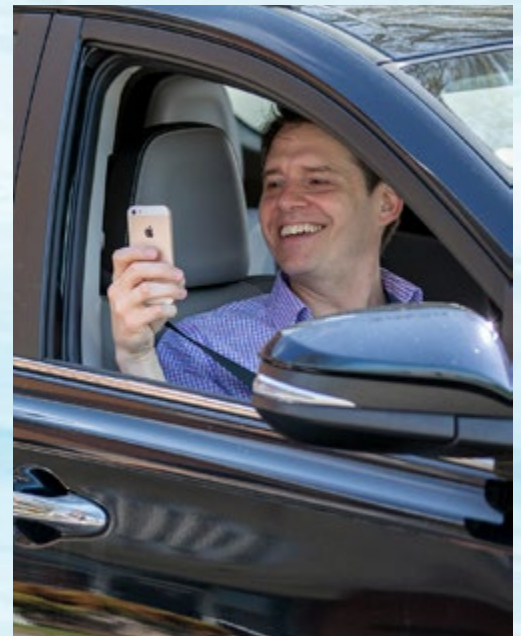
On March 20, graduating medical students at EVMS joined their peers across the nation in learning where they matched for their residences.

Social distancing prevented the traditional ceremony from being held. But the students were able to pick up their Match Day envelopes at a festive drive-through event, with a few faculty members and EVMS President Richard V.

Homan, MD — at an appropriate distance away (and before masks were mandated) — cheering for them.

“We are very proud of the work and dedication our students have put forth to get to this point in their medical school careers,” says Ronald Flenner, MD (MD ’89) Vice Dean of Academic Affairs. Students matched at some of the nation’s most prestigious programs, including the Mayo Clinic. □









Students take healthcare to the street

Through the Community-Engaged Learning initiative called Street Health, EVMS students learn and serve people in need

Thomas Stokes leans in as Emergency Medicine resident Gavin Rogers, MD (MD '19), pores over a piece of paper torn from a notebook and reviews a list of numbers scribbled on it.

Weight, cholesterol, blood sugar, blood pressure? All good.

Mr. Stokes beams with relief.

"I don't really keep up with my health," says Mr. Stokes, 62, of Norfolk, who lacks health insurance, is on disability and was homeless for three years. He's attending a free EVMS Street Health clinic "to get everything checked out."

"This service is a blessing," Mr. Stokes says.

Street Health, like all of the Community-Engaged Learning initiatives

at EVMS, integrates community service with structured learning. Students venture out of the classroom and sharpen skills through practical experiences as they tackle health needs in the community.

Street Health launched during the 2018-19 school year, led by Andy Abayan, now a third-year medical student. Under the supervision of a physician, students conduct health screenings for people experiencing homelessness, provide referrals for follow-ups and collect data for continuity of care.

He was inspired by the three years he had volunteered with Doctors Without Walls in his hometown of Santa Barbara, California. The group holds clinics in parks to deliver healthcare to people living on the streets.

Wave Hatton, Medical Master's Class of 2020, checks Thomas Stokes' blood pressure at a Street Health clinic.

“This program gives us a chance to meet people, get to know them, build trust in the community and provide them with preventative and primary care, so they don’t end up in the ER.”

Gavin Rogers, MD

“I had the most wonderful experience working with that population,” Mr. Abayan recalls. “We’re all one step away from being in their situation. A lot of them had one bad thing happen and they couldn’t get themselves out of it.”

That experience, he says, not only fueled his desire to practice emergency medicine, it inspired him to pitch the idea for Street Health to Don Robison, PhD, Director for Community-Engaged Learning. “We’re such a community-oriented school,” Mr. Abayan says. People experiencing homelessness “are part of our community.”

Katherine Schaffer and Fatmata Conteh, both of the MD Class of 2022, are the current co-leaders for Street Health. “Our goal is to bring basic primary care to those who have the greatest barrier,” Ms. Schaffer says, “and to create relationships and build future trust with physicians.”

Ms. Conteh became involved in Street Health because she wanted hands-on experience. Before medical school, she worked as a rehabilitation counselor for adults with mental health disorders, some of whom did not have homes. She says the clinics can treat people who would otherwise have to go to the emergency room and incur bills they can’t pay. “It’s a vulnerable population that falls through the cracks very easily,” she adds.

Street Health holds a free clinic at Freemason Baptist Church on the fourth Saturday of the month. That coincides with a free community lunch the church provides. [EDITOR’S NOTE: These activities were suspended when the COVID-19 pandemic struck.] During the winter, Street Health partners with the Norfolk Emergency Shelter Team, or NEST, to hold free health clinics at NEST shelter sites. NEST is the City of Norfolk’s program through which churches provide meals and shelter for single adults who are experiencing homelessness.

Typically, Ms. Schaffer says, about 20 people attend the clinics



at the church. All have their vitals checked; about half undergo more thorough examinations. Many of the patients at the clinic are repeat visitors.

On the fourth Saturday of January, Ms. Schaffer wasn’t expecting to see many patients because the weather was nice. But the clinic ended up taking care of about 25 patients over two hours.

A couple of people already were waiting out front when a white EVMS van arrived at the church and students began unloading supplies. The clinic would be ready to open in 30 minutes.

Moving quickly up and down a hallway, Ms. Schaffer assigned team partners and their duties. The hallway was set up with a check-in station and several examination areas.

A large, round table was loaded with pain relievers,



TOP LEFT: Uma Markan, MD Class of 2023, performs a vitals screening on a patient at the Street Health clinic.



TOP RIGHT: Chirag Patel, MD Class of 2023, talks with a clinic patient.


BOTTOM: Fatmata Conteh, MD Class of 2022, takes a history on a patient.



decongestants, antacids, vitamins, fungal creams, bandages and other supplies to share with patients as needed. Street Health students also were ready to hand out donated clothing and pass out watches to patients to help them get to follow-up appointments on time.

A group from Wagner Macula & Retina Center conducted eye exams to assess potential problems, such as vision loss from diabetes. Alan Wagner, MD (Ophthalmology Residency '86), founder of the practice, is well aware of the need for this care — he is an EVMS alumnus and member of the school's Board of Visitors.

On this day, 22 students helped conduct the clinic, supervised by a surgeon, a psychiatrist and Dr. Gavin



Rogers. Dr. Rogers assisted with Street Health while he was a student. Now he's back to offer guidance.

Dr. Rogers says emergency rooms treat a lot of people experiencing homelessness because many don't have health insurance or primary care physicians. And not trusting the healthcare system, many avoid seeking care until their conditions deteriorate.

"This program gives us a chance to meet people," he says, "get to know them, build trust in the community and provide them with preventative and primary care, so they don't end up in the ER."

Street Health patients have presented conditions ranging from strains, sprains, fractures and wounds to urinary tract infections and high blood pressure to diabetes and HIV, he says. "It's a bit like the ER. We see a little of everything."

Norine Kuhn, a Research Associate at the EVMS Strelitz Diabetes Center, volunteered her time at the clinic to train the students to screen patients for high cholesterol and diabetes.

"I'm a big proponent of knowing your numbers," Ms. Kuhn says, such as A1C, a blood test that measures average blood glucose levels.

"Once you know your numbers, we can do something for you," Ms. Kuhn says. "This is a way for us to be able to help people who basically cannot afford to go to see a doctor. We can provide information and refer them to outreach centers that can help them get the healthcare they need."

Diabetes, she says, is especially important to diagnose and control because it can affect all aspects of life, such as contributing to vision loss and heart and circulatory problems.

Ms. Kuhn's mother died from complications from diabetes, which inspired her passion for diabetes education. "I don't want anyone to ever have to go through what I went through. If I can help this small group of people, then I've made a difference."

Ollie Celestin, right, attended his first Street Health clinic after experiencing homelessness. Mr. Celestin depends on the care provided by Street Health, Freemason Baptist Church and Norfolk's NEST program.



**Street Health
clinics can treat
people who would
otherwise have to
go to the emergency
room and incur
bills they can't pay.**

STREET HEALTH STUDENT LEADERS



"Our goal is to bring basic primary care to those who have the greatest barrier, and to create relationships and build future trust with physicians."

Katherine Schaffer, MD ('22)



[Street Health focuses on a] "vulnerable population that falls through the cracks very easily."

Fatmata Conteh, MD ('22)



"We're such a community-oriented school. [People experiencing homelessness] are part of our community."

Andy Abayan, MD ('21)

To begin, an intake team at the clinic collects basic information from the patient.

Next, a patient goes to vitals stations to have important indicators checked and recorded, such as blood pressure, height, weight and cholesterol.

Patients with chronic conditions like diabetes then visit with a team of EVMS students. The students present their findings to the doctors who weigh in and go back to the patient with the team for further assessments if needed.

Mr. Stokes pedaled over to the church from his new home nearby to come to what he believed to be his fifth or six Street Health clinic. He says he hopes the Street Health clinics will continue indefinitely to help more people like him. Living on the streets, he adds, can lead to despair, depression and sickness.

Mr. Stokes had been living with and taking care of his ill parents. Then the family home was sold, and he found himself with nowhere to go.

"I went from a three-story house to a park bench in three weeks," he says. He slept on sidewalks for about three years until he found housing with help from Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

Parish Hodge, 48, of Norfolk, came to Freemason Baptist Church with a friend to attend the free lunch. Mr. Hodge, who says he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and has been homeless for about six months, is staying temporarily at a Salvation Army shelter.

When Mr. Hodge saw the EVMS van, he was inspired to go to the clinic to have his foot examined for a pulled muscle. The Street Health team gave him Motrin to alleviate the pain.



“They were really nice and really respectful,” says Mr. Hodge, who plans to return to the clinic when he can get to the church.

Ollie Celestin, 51, of Norfolk, also had the free lunch in mind when he visited the church. Intrigued when he spied medical students, he decided to check up on his health and get an eye exam. This was his first time at a Street Health clinic. He was the first in line.

“We basically helped each other today,” Mr. Celestin says of the EVMS students. “I just needed to know about my health more than anything.”

Mr. Celestin has been homeless since just before Christmas and staying in NEST shelters. He says he has conquered a drug addiction and is optimistic that his living situation will improve.



Norine Kuhn, Research Associate with the EVMS Strelitz Diabetes Center, shares a laugh with a patient at the clinic.



Street Health enables EVMS students, under the supervision of physicians, to conduct health screenings for people experiencing homelessness. They also provide referrals for follow-up appointments and collect information for continuity of care.

Freemason Street Baptist Church is pleased to provide a safe environment for the Street Health clinics, says Stephanie Van Leeuwen. She oversees community outreach at the church, which also provides free Friday breakfasts in addition to the free monthly community meals.

Ms. Van Leeuwen notes that the city holds an annual “Homeless Connect” event to provide dental and medical care, haircuts, showers and other services to people who don’t have access to basic necessities. She says the Street Health clinics and the free meals mean people experiencing homelessness don’t have to wait for another year to pass before they can get services they need.

In addition to holding the clinics, the Street Health students volunteer during the second Friday of the month to help serve breakfast. “They do a lot out of the goodness of their hearts,” Ms. Van Leeuwen says.

Ms. Schaffer adds that helping serve the church breakfast is a way to make connections with people face-to-face, “not just as a physician who wants to poke and prod you.”

Creating those relationships builds trust, she says. She’s had some people she’s met at breakfast later see her at a clinic and seek her advice.

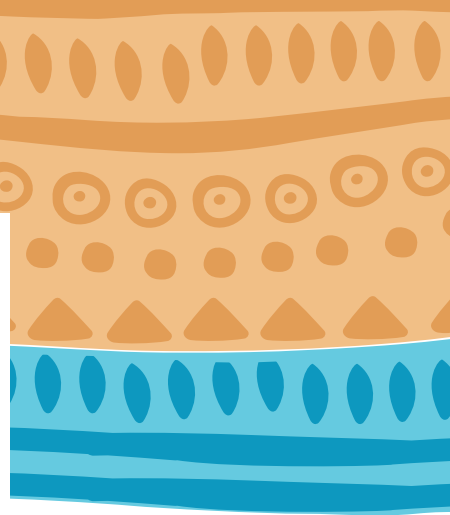
“We get to meet them where they are,” she says. “We get to see them not just as patients, but as friends, colleagues, peers.” □

To make a gift to a Community-Engaged Learning initiative at EVMS, contact EVMS Development at 757.965.8500 or email giving@evms.edu.





At the SNMA Cultural Fair, Alena Stewart, Administrative Assistant with EVMS Community-Engaged Learning, wore a traditional Russian garment to represent her heritage.



Rochelle Yarborough and Marlene Antrum joined Taylor Dyson, MD Class of 2022 (center), at the Melanin in Medicine conference, sponsored by the SNMA chapter at EVMS. During an interactive patient panel, Mrs. Yarborough (left) and Mrs. Antrum shared their journeys with vitiligo.



The deep, fragrant scents of chiles, cinnamon, ginger and lemongrass filled Lester Hall on a Friday afternoon in February. The distinctive aromas represented more than a dozen traditional dishes prepared for this year's Student National Medical Association Cultural Fair.

The event is held each year for the entire community to celebrate the cultures at EVMS. "We created this event last year because we have a diverse class and a diverse school," says Dominic Adams, MD Class of 2021. "We wanted a way to showcase that, and we thought food was a great way to do it."

While it is a food-focused event, the conversation is just as important to SNMA members. "The Cultural Fair provides an opportunity for discussion and education on race, ethnicity and culture," says Faven Russom, MS (Medical Master's '19), MD Class of 2023. "These are all important subjects that allow us to become better students, physicians, colleagues and professionals."

SNMA is a national organization that aims to support underrepresented minority medical students, but most

SNMA events are open to students of all backgrounds. "We welcome everyone to hear and learn about the experiences of minority students, physicians and patients," Ms. Russom says. "Taking the time to understand the challenges faced by underrepresented populations can greatly improve the interactions and relationships we have with our patients and help us all become more culturally competent physicians."

The organization recently partnered with the Dermatology Club to host the first Melanin in Medicine conference on campus. Organizers wanted to bring awareness to the various skin conditions that impact individuals of all races and ethnicities.

During the conference, students attended lectures, interactive patient panels and an exhibitor fair. Among the topics of discussion were skin, nail and hair disorders; vitiligo diagnosis and treatment; and melanoma.

Students from Norfolk State University, College of William & Mary, Hampton University and Christopher Newport University attended the event, as well as several



The annual Cultural Fair is one of several events, conferences and seminars hosted by the SNMA chapter at EVMS to help celebrate diversity and increase understanding of different cultures.

students from Maury High School, Bayside High School and Norfolk Academy.

“Events like these are important as there is a great need to increase the number of racially and ethnically underrepresented minorities in healthcare,” says Taylor Dyson, MD Class of 2022. “Melanin in Medicine is one example of how EVMS is taking steps to increase diversity in the field of medicine, specifically dermatology.”

Diversity among medical specialties was one of the main topics of discussion at the SNMA Region VI Leadership Institute hosted at EVMS in September.

“The Regional Leadership Institute’s purpose is to build leadership among students in the health and pre-health professions programs,” says Mekbib Gemed, Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion. “SNMA recognizes that diversity of professionals in all specialties advances excellence in healthcare and improves health outcomes.”

During the conference, students gained new skills through clinical seminars, professional lectures, panels and discussions on various social issues.

“We learned about leadership and how we can become competent leaders in the medical field,” says Stafford Brown, MS (Medical Master’s ’18), MD Class of 2022 and EVMS SNMA chapter President. “Oftentimes, minorities face

additional struggles to obtain positions of leadership, and it’s been great to get advice that is specific to us.”

In addition to conferences and seminars, the EVMS chapter of SNMA also provides rewarding opportunities to volunteer in various mentoring programs at colleges across Hampton Roads.

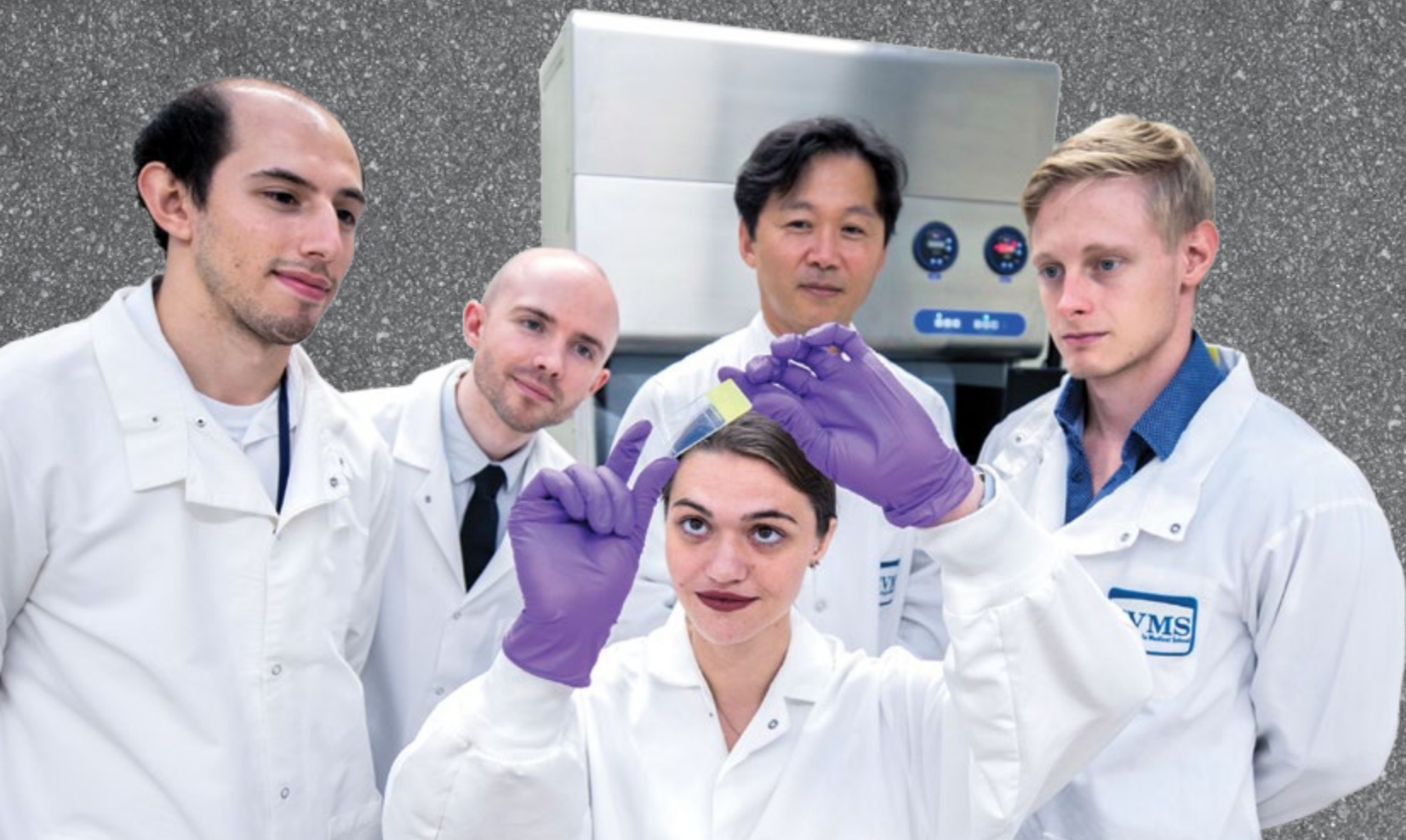
“As a pre-medical student, I did not have the tools I needed to ensure success in the medical school application process or to prepare for medical school,” says Le’Nisha Williams, MD Class of 2022. “With SNMA’s strong affiliation with various undergraduate institutions, we are a resource to the students in our mentorship programs and can provide them with the tools many of us did not have.”

For many members, SNMA is more than a club or organization — it’s a supportive and inclusive family that welcomes all. The dozens of people at the Cultural Fair gathered around food from countries such as Ghana, Jamaica, Poland and the Philippines are great examples of that community.

“So often people forget it’s not just a race thing,” says Shammah Okai, MD Class of 2021, former SNMA President. “There are so many other ethnicities and cultures within this community that we need to highlight and celebrate, so what better way to celebrate Black History Month than with a celebration of diversity?” □

Thank you!

In light of the pandemic, we ended our month-long Checkered Flag Challenge nearly two weeks early. Even so, you rose to the challenge and helped us cross the finish line — EVMS raised over \$71,000! Because of you, we can continue our vital research, education and patient care, which is more important now than ever. With you in our corner, there is little we cannot accomplish!



EVMS
Eastern Virginia Medical School



Checkered Flag



From EVMS to CDC: Alumnus training as “Disease Detective”

His work as an Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer with the CDC recently took Dr. Eric Chow, far right, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Growing up, Eric Chow, MD, MPH, was fascinated by microbes. Their complex interactions with humans and the environment offered him a unique understanding of the role they play in medicine. It was this interest that eventually led him to work in public health with a focus on infectious diseases.

A medical school counselor introduced Dr. Chow (MPH '10, MD '13) to EVMS while he was an undergraduate student at Stanford University. After earning two degrees at EVMS, he completed a four-year residency in combined internal medicine and pediatrics at Brown University, where he also worked an additional year as the Pediatrics Chief Resident. But he says his public health degree and medical training from EVMS is what sparked his interest

in applying for an experiential service fellowship with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

Dr. Chow currently works as an Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer in the Influenza Division at the CDC. The two-year program trains medical professionals and public health scientists to become “disease detectives” where each officer develops skills in applied epidemiology. In collaboration with local public health officials, the officers lead and investigate outbreaks of diseases. These experiences allow them to develop skill sets in interpreting epidemiological analyses and forging

community partnerships to become future public health leaders.

While most of his research centers around influenza and other respiratory

“EVMS’ training gave me the firm clinical and epidemiological foundation I needed to get into a good residency and now to be selected for this competitive fellowship. I’m forever grateful for the education and the support I’ve had from EVMS.”

– ERIC CHOW, MD, MPH

viral infections, Dr. Chow co-led both the investigation of the measles outbreak in

Rockland County, New York, and the border health screening efforts as part of the Ebola response team in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2019 with local and international partners.

“I like that I get to work with people from different fields — people whom I would never have been able to work with if I were in the clinical realm,” Dr. Chow says. “And I like that I have the opportunity to do things that require different skill sets.”

Dr. Chow credits his EVMS experience for contributing to his success so far.

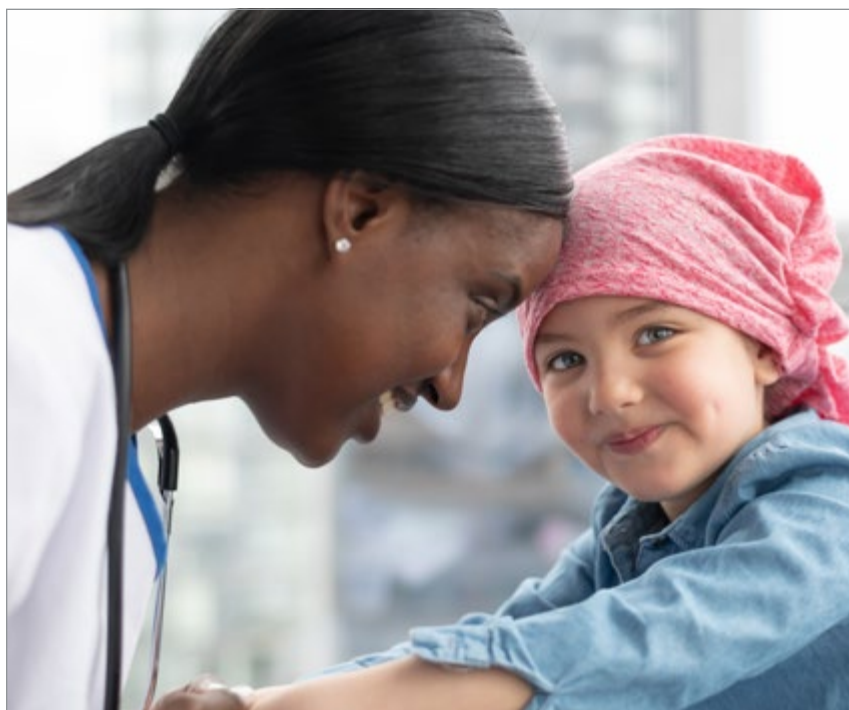
“EVMS’ training gave me the firm clinical and epidemiological foundation I needed to get into a good residency and now to be selected for this competitive fellowship. I’m forever grateful for the education and the support I’ve had from EVMS.”

In his spare time, Dr. Chow likes to cook and travel with his husband, who works as a marine biologist. The two traveled to Tasmania this past winter.

After Dr. Chow’s fellowship with the CDC wraps up in June, he’ll head to the University of Washington to be an adult infectious disease fellow. He then plans to jump back into public health and look for a position as a state Epidemiologist or Chief Medical Officer. □



Eric Chow, MD, MPH, left, shakes hands during his induction into the Gold Humanism Society at EVMS in 2013.



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IVF baby comes full circle at EVMS

The story of how Phillip Connell, MD (MD '20), found his way to EVMS started nearly 30 years ago in a petri dish.

After his parents had a difficult time conceiving, a family member recommended they reach out to the EVMS Jones Institute for Reproductive Medicine. They had two failed attempts at in vitro fertilization before trying one last time in 1991. It was successful, and Mr. Connell and his sister, Cameron, were born.

"I was one of the first 1,000 Jones babies," Mr. Connell says, "and now I'm back here learning medicine at the place where medicine created me."

Mr. Connell was always interested in the medical field, but he also was fascinated with how things were made. That led him to study biomedical engineering at the University of Virginia.

"I'm so thankful for that time," he says, "because I wasn't sure if I would be OK with just engineering and creating devices that helped people live healthier lives. The experience made me realize that I wanted to work face-to-face with patients as well."

With the ultimate goal of attending medical school, he stayed at UVA after graduation to pursue a one-year master's degree in commerce and business. "To some, it might have seemed like an unusual choice, but it opened my mind to how economics play a role in a hospital setting and how economic forces shape the way our health policy works. I hope to use my engineering and business backgrounds to create solutions for patients."

After applying for medical school, he was elated to learn he

earned a spot at EVMS. "I was very thankful for being accepted by the people who created me. I'm honored to be here."

Initially, he wasn't sure what specialty he would pursue. He wanted to remain open-minded, but his experiences in one particular area drew him closer to a decision.

Each time he worked with Alfred Abuhamad, MD, the Mason C. Andrews Chair in Obstetrics and Gynecology and Professor and Chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and the reproductive endocrinologists, "It was a powerful experience," he says. "It really meant a lot to me to go back there and work with some of the people who were working with the same technology and medicine that helped create me and my sister. That solidified my decision to go into OB/GYN."

Along the way, he's been able to share his story and comfort patients. "I was recently with a woman pregnant with twins, who was getting an advanced fetal echo. I was able to tell her about my family and my mom's experience and calm her down." He says moments like these confirm he's made the right decision.

As it turned out, the ultrasound

LEFT: When Phillip Connell needed a break from studying, he would visit the Jones Institute Atrium where a series of displays celebrate EVMS' pioneering work in IVF.

BELOW: The Connells treasure the photos they have with Dr. Howard Jones taken during annual reunions with other IVF families.

technician doing the scan that day was the only technician working with the Jones Institute in 1991 and most likely scanned Mr. Connell's heart before he was born.

"I thanked her for taking such good care of us and for making sure we were OK. It was a beautiful moment." He says he's grateful for that sense of connection and history. "I wouldn't have had that at any other medical school."

Attending EVMS feels like destiny, he says. "I know that's an obscure thought, but whenever I get bogged down in studying and tests, I can come to the Jones Institute and find the brick that my grandparents donated in my name outside of the building. I can feel a sense of belonging.

"I can feel a story, my own story, how I've come full circle to this point back here to learn medicine. I'm going to take that forward and help other people have the same happiness that my parents were able to find through the help and care of the Jones Institute."

While he leaves EVMS soon for his Obstetrics and Gynecology Residency at Baylor University Medical Center, he hopes to return one day. "I'm interested in pursuing reproductive endocrinology and fertility as a fellowship, and it would be amazing to train at the Jones Institute eventually. I don't think my time at EVMS is coming to a close. I don't think there will be an end to the connection." □

"I was very thankful for being accepted by the people who created me. I'm honored to be here."

— PHILLIP CONNELL, MD (MD '20)





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