

EVMS

magazine

Our Global DNA

Stories from
EVMS' global
community



EVMS Graduate Medical Education hosted a ceremony on July 29 to honor family, friends and patients lost to COVID-19. The event began with a ringing of local church bells, followed by a moment of silence and musical performance. Guests were provided pinwheels to place in the David L. Bernd Commons in remembrance of those who were lost.

Photo by DOUG GARDNER





EVMS magazine

ISSUE 14.1 | 2021-2022

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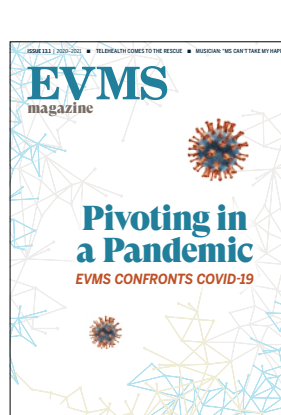
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

*"You give but little when you give of
your possessions. It is when you give
of yourself that you truly give."*

In 1923, the Lebanese-American poet Kahlil Gibran wrote these words in his famous book "The Prophet." Since that time, "The Prophet" has been republished into more than 100 languages, making it one of the most translated books in history.

I used that quote as an epigraph to "Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynecology: A Practical Approach," an open access e-book I wrote that has been translated to numerous languages and widely shared around the world as a resource for healthcare teams who want to expand their ultrasound training and provide better care to their patients.

The quote also comes to mind when I think of the many internationally-born members of our EVMS community, some of whose stories are captured in this issue.

I know firsthand the challenges immigrants face. I grew up during a civil war in Lebanon. After earning my medical degree from the American University of Beirut, I completed a residency in obstetrics and gynecology and a fellowship in maternal-fetal medicine at the University of Miami before pursuing a second fellowship in ultrasound and prenatal diagnosis at Yale University.

In 1992, I was recruited to EVMS to help start the Maternal-Fetal Medicine program. I was thankful then and now for the opportunity. It was a decision that changed my life.

EVMS is an institution that I love. It is where I have spent most of my academic career. It is where I have forged friendships and connections with colleagues who have challenged me and made me a better physician, researcher and administrator.

That is why I was honored to step into the role of Interim President, Provost and Dean of the School of Medicine in August following the retirement of Dr. Richard Homan.



As Interim President, my primary goal will always be to support and enhance the mission of EVMS and to strengthen our education, research and clinical activities. A major focus of mine will be expanding key partnerships and community engagements to improve the health of our minority citizens. Indeed, as a community medical school, every decision that we make has to be weighed for its impact on reducing health disparities.

As the author and poet Mr. Gibran wrote, "It is when you give of yourself that you truly give." That message is at the center of EVMS' mission, too.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve you and look forward to working together toward improving the health of Hampton Roads.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alfred Abuhamad'.

Alfred Abuhamad, MD



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PHOTO ESSAY

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Pictured on the cover:
Maryanne Gathambo,
MPH, Dr. Luis Borda
and Dr. Zeinab
Kassem

Seen & Heard

The EVMS community makes news



The Medical Society of Virginia Foundation presented Matthew Van De Graaf, MD Class of 2022, the Salute to Service Award. The award is given to a medical student or resident for their outstanding efforts to substantially improve patient care both locally and abroad.

Jovanna Tracz, MD Class of 2024

“Conducting research changes the way you think. You look at course materials through a new lens.” Jovanna Tracz, MD Class of 2024, one of nine medical students to receive the American Brain Tumor Association Jack & Fay Netchin Medical Student Summer Research Fellowship.



Congratulations to all of the Summer Scholars who presented their research on July 29. The Summer Scholars Program is a mentored research internship offered by EVMS Pediatrics at Children’s Hospital of The King’s Daughters. This year’s program featured 49 EVMS medical students, two EVMS Health Professions students, as well as 12 students from other universities.



Business as usual isn’t working for people, and it hasn’t worked for a long time. Pick your health problem and the data hold the same pattern.”

Betty Bibbins, MD, BSN (MD ’82)

Dr. Bibbins, a member the EVMS Board of Visitors, detailing the findings of a series of virtual listening sessions conducted by EVMS. More than 700 community members shared their experiences during these sessions and discussed how EVMS and other area institutions can help residents of southeastern Virginia experience better health outcomes.



As medical schools across the country receive record numbers of applications, **some admissions officers are crediting the influence of Anthony Fauci, MD, during the pandemic — calling the trend “the Fauci effect.”**

Virginia Business recently reported **EVMS applications increased nearly 30 percent**, from 6,800 to more than 8,800 for 151 slots.



WHAT UNITES US IS LEADERSHIP.

INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN for his trailblazing work in academic medicine and surgery, Dr. Britt has devoted his entire career to improving healthcare for all of us. As a beloved EVMS educator and mentor, he has built an incredible resume of leadership roles, accolades and influential research — helping to pioneer the field of acute care surgery while also providing excellent patient care. For years he has fought to erase healthcare disparities, and has continuously advocated for the inclusion of women and minorities in medical leadership. Dr. Britt is a true inspiration for all of us at EVMS, and we are so proud and grateful for his leadership.

Congratulations to L.D. Britt, MD, MPH,
for earning the American College of Surgeons (ACS) Lifetime
Achievement Award. He is only the fifth such recipient in the
108-year history of the ACS.

EVMS
Eastern Virginia Medical School

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Trending

Highlights from conversations
on EVMS social media



#evmsedu What could be a better post-exam treat than a cuddle sesh with these cuties! Thanks to @evms_mpa_program for sharing this photo with us.



EVMS Family and Community Medicine residents recently joined @ERTNorfolk for the Prescribe-A-Trail Community Health Walk at Plum Point Park in Norfolk.



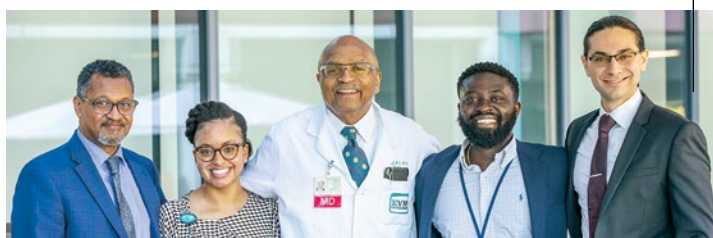
Dr. Anna Stamas



Dr. Rock Vomer



Dr. Emma York



Congratulations to the Dr. L.D. Britt Resident Fellows on completing their final presentations! *Pictured left to right:* Mekbib Gemedo, Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion; Lois Davis, MD; L.D. Britt, MD, MPH, Edward J. Brickhouse Chair in Surgery, Henry Ford Professor of Surgery, Vice Dean for Clinical Affairs and Professor and Chair of Surgery; Kwasi Ampomah, DO, MPH; Stephan Duran, MD.



@EVMSedu "25 years ago, I was diagnosed with #T1Diabetes in this hospital. Today, I started @EVMS OBGYN Residency and get to take care of patients (just like me)." **Lauren Forbes, MD, MPH**



The sixth Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security #CommuniVax team is from @EVMSedu. The team aims to strengthen COVID-19 vaccination efforts by putting communities of color at the center of those endeavors.



We are proud to be a sponsor of the Habitat for Humanity of South Hampton Roads Inc. 2021 Women Build Week!



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Q&A

Success by design

Director of EVMS' new Master of Healthcare Administration program encourages students to create personal strategic plans

Interview by MARY WESTBROOK | Photo by BRENDAN ASH

Some of the best advice Glenn Yap, PhD, MBA, ever received can be captured in just three words: "Listen to everyone."

Dr. Yap, Assistant Professor and Director of EVMS' new Master of Healthcare Administration program, insists that deceptively simple guidance has made all the difference in his career and encouraged him to keep

an open mind and seek out people who don't share his perspective or life experiences.

"You have to surround yourself with smart people and, most important, people who think differently," Dr. Yap says. "If you're only listening to people who think just like you do, you'll have great conversations as you both fall off the edge of a cliff together."

Dr. Yap's own career reflects his commitment to going after the unknown. After earning his MBA from Miami University in 1988, he served for 30 years in the U.S. Air Force and retired as a colonel in 2018. When he joined EVMS later that year, he had executive-level experience at hospitals and clinics across the United States, along with leadership roles in the Air Force's Office of the Surgeon General and at the Army-Baylor Graduate Program in Health and Business Administration.

At EVMS, he's focused on improving healthcare access for underserved communities and ensuring his students have the support and advice they need to make informed decisions as they embark on their careers and find their passions.

Q. What was your childhood like?

A. I grew up in a small town in Ohio. Both of my parents were born in the Philippines. Dad was a general surgeon. Mom helped at his office. I was the middle kid. My parents provided us with a safe, happy environment to grow up in, but it was not without its challenges. My sister and I were the only Asians in our elementary school. Kids that age make fun of each other for all kinds of reasons — "You have red hair. You're too skinny." Because we were minorities, we faced our own teasing and prejudice.

Q. How did you come to your military service?

A. While I was earning my MBA at Miami University, I talked with an Air Force recruiter who visited campus. I thought, "That could be interesting. Why not?" The plan was to stay in for four to six years. I ended up staying for 30.

I loved the Air Force. I learned so much. I tell everyone going into the military, though, "Those of us on active duty have it easy. It's the kids and the spouses who have it hard." I remember once, shortly after we'd moved to a new place, my younger son said, "I'm not going to make any friends here. We're going to be moving soon." I was very lucky all those years to have the support of my wonderful wife, Aranka, and two sons, Jonthan and Alex. There's always a sacrifice.

I fully believe in the core values of the Air Force: integrity first, service before self



Family-life balance is important to Dr. Yap, who is surrounded, left to right, by his son Jonathan; wife, Aranka; son Alexander and granddaughter Juliette.



Family photos courtesy of Dr. Yap

and excellence in all we do. They have shaped who I am today, and I've tried to instill them in my kids and my students. I think those values speak to what EVMS stands for, too.

Q. Why is mentorship such a big part of your work and what does it look like in practice?

A. Early in my Air Force career, a more senior officer sat down with me and my wife and said, "If you were to stay in the Air Force for 20 years, what would your life look like?" It was the first time we had been asked to map out that kind of vision.

Now, I encourage my students to create their own personal strategic plans. You want to be the CEO of a major healthcare system? Great! It's more difficult if you also have five kids at home, and you want to spend a lot of time with them. It's not impossible, but if you start to talk about the trade-offs up front, it's easier to find the balance that feels right for you. That has been important in my life.

Related to that longer view, I tell students all the time, "Your first job — even your second or third job — may not be perfect. But does it move you toward your goal? Are you gaining experience?" It's good to keep an open mind. Your plan can change. It takes time to find what you are passionate about.

Q. What do you find most fulfilling about your work at EVMS?

A. Many people mentored me throughout my career. I want to pay that forward with my students. I want to help them understand the challenges they will face. I want to help them find ways to follow their interests and find their focuses.

I've also been fortunate to be part of a research team led by Dr. Andrew Plunk, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and researcher in the Community Health and Research division of EVMS Pediatrics, looking at health disparities in the public health community. It's an opportunity to effect change in a boots-on-the-ground way. We're helping residents who are underserved in the



Dr. Yap served in the U.S. Air Force for 30 years — a career he says made possible by the sacrifices of his children and wife, Aranka.

“

IT'S GOOD TO KEEP AN OPEN MIND. YOUR PLAN CAN CHANGE. IT TAKES TIME TO FIND WHAT YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT.”

Glenn Yap, PhD, MBA

healthcare system and working to make sure that they feel respected and safe within our community.

Q. What excites you most about your new role as Director of EVMS' Master of Healthcare Administration program?

A. It's a chance to work with even more students and to help shape something new. Compared to other programs, the MHA program is more business-focused, which is a good match for my background. It was created in direct response to workforce needs in Hampton Roads. Our area is growing and changing. We need to prepare the next generation of healthcare leaders. □



Watch a video of Dr. Yap discussing his life and work. evms.edu/DrYap

RESEARCH

New research center takes on mind-body connection in disease

Story and Photos by DOUG GARDNER



When a handful of EVMS basic scientists decided to combine their expertise and launch a new research center, their focus met a pressing need.

“Nowhere is the need for a multidisciplinary approach more apparent than in the growing recognition that interactions between the central nervous system and peripheral organ systems play significant roles in maintaining overall health,” says Larry Sanford,

PhD, Professor of Pathology and Anatomy and Founding Director of the EVMS Center for Integrative Neuroscience and Inflammatory Diseases (CINID).

“When people have a disease, they don’t just have a problem going wrong with one system. It is multiple systems,” he says. “When things go wrong, it impacts everything — the brain and the body.”

This complex communication between the body and the brain is challenging to understand but filled with potential. A single research advance could yield new



Founders of the multidisciplinary CINID group include, from left, Dr. Alberto Musto; Dr. Ming-Lei Guo; Dr. Larry Sanford; Dr. Woong-Ki Kim; Dr. Laurie Wellman; Dr. Elena Galkina; and Dr. Richard Britten. Not pictured are Dr. Anca Dobrian; Dr. Hamid Okhravi; and Dr. Hargsoon Yoon (Norfolk State University). Pictured far left is Austin Adkins, MS, Biomedical Sciences PhD candidate.

treatments for a range of diseases where inflammation plays a central role, including Alzheimer's Disease, atherosclerosis, diabetes and cancer.

The new center builds on existing strengths in the faculty — for instance, pairing neuroscientists with researchers knowledgeable about how organ systems work and interact. The team also includes physicians and an engineering professor from Norfolk State University. While the researchers represent disparate specialties, the “neuro-immune interface” unites the scientific disciplines.

“In general, we are focusing on the immune system and inflammation in the nervous system because this interaction has a role in virtually everything you want to talk about,” he says. “The critical thing is to find some underlying mechanism that is involved in different disease entities.”

Founded just prior to the pandemic, CINID encompasses 10 researchers who have formed multidisciplinary teams to tackle a dozen focal areas.

The impetus for the new center was the realization

that more research funding opportunities require a multi-disciplinary team approach.

“Being competitive in the current research environment often requires a wide range of skills and expertise that is found only in multidisciplinary teams,” he says.

The team approach works. One of the intangible benefits of the new center has been the broad exchange of ideas during monthly meetings and in small gatherings.

“One of the more enjoyable parts of this is the intellectual interplay,” Dr. Sanford says.

“People see connections across research areas and contribute in ways that you wouldn’t have thought that they would.” □



We are focusing on the immune system and inflammation in the nervous system because this interaction has a role in virtually everything you want to talk about.”

Larry Sanford, PhD
Professor of Pathology and Anatomy |
Founding Director of the EVMS Center for
Integrative Neuroscience and
Inflammatory Diseases

The EVMS diabetes team behind the Western Tidewater project includes, from left, Dr. Elias Siraj; Dr. David Lieb; Dr. Carolina Casellini; and Dr. Henri Parson.



COMMUNITY & OUTREACH

EVMS project targets diabetes in Western Tidewater

Four-year effort will look for sustainable way to protect, improve the health of region's 160,000 residents

Story and Photo by DOUG GARDNER

EVMS is launching a major effort to target diabetes in Western Tidewater — a largely rural area where the disease is a leading cause of hospitalizations and death.

The \$800,000, four-year project is expected to launch by early 2022. It will measure the impact of a coordinated, multi-faceted approach to improve access to diabetes-related education and care in the region and to reduce hospitalizations due to diabetes and its complications, says endocrinologist David Lieb, MD, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine and Medical Director for the project.

The 160,000 residents of Western Tidewater are more likely than others in Virginia to have diabetes, Dr. Lieb says. They have high rates of traditional risk factors for diabetes and its complications including older age, obesity and food insecurity.

The region also has a large African-American population, Dr. Lieb says. African Americans in Western Tidewater are twice as likely as whites to be hospitalized for complications of diabetes.

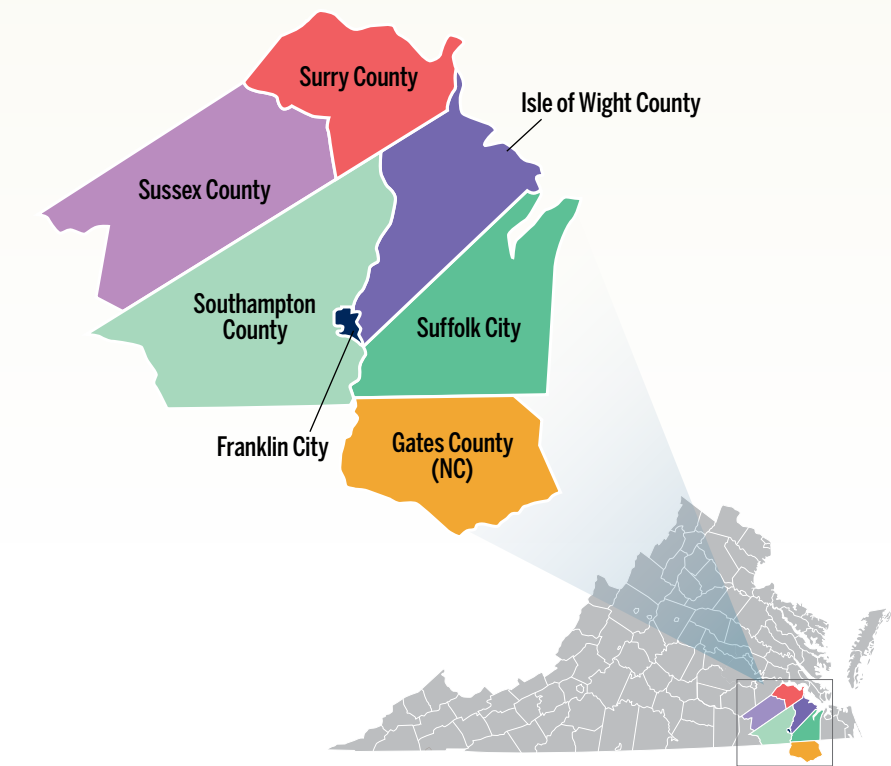
All this contributes to the driving need for intervention, says Dr. Lieb.

“It is imperative that our community determine impactful methods to reduce the prevalence of diabetes, care for those with diabetes and reduce rates of hospitalization and death from diabetes and its related conditions,” he says.

Alfred Abuhamad, MD, Interim President and Provost of EVMS and Dean of the School of Medicine, says the project speaks to the school's community-focused vision.

“Thanks to support from the community, EVMS has developed considerable expertise in diabetes,” Dr. Abuhamad says. “It's fitting that we

Localities included in the region defined in the service area as Western Tidewater (WT)



Source: Obici Healthcare Foundation Service Area, 2018 Community Health Needs Assessment. Note: Sussex County zip codes included in service area = 23890, 23891, 23888; Surry County zip codes included in service area = 23883, 23846, 23837; Southampton County zip codes included in service area = 23866, 23878, 23837, 23874, 23829.

leverage that capability to provide support to our underserved communities.”

Dr. Lieb is one four main investigators on the project from the EVMS Strelitz Diabetes Center. He is joined by Elias Siraj, MD, Professor of Internal Medicine, Chief of Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders and Director of the Strelitz Diabetes Center; Henri Parson, PhD, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine and Director of Microvascular Biology; and Carolina Casellini, MD, Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine.

Dr. Siraj has played a key role in the conception of the project and is now collaborating and overseeing the project. He applauded the decision by EVMS leadership to fund the work and says it reinforces the school’s commitment to improve health disparities in the community.

“The Western Tidewater area is one of the most affected areas in Virginia when it comes to diabetes and its complications,” Dr. Siraj says. “At

the same time, it is an area where the healthcare coverage is very poor. It is with this background that our study will make a difference in the community. It will lead to a better understanding of diabetes and its complications in the community and steer the patients towards better care and improved outcomes.”

EVMS has had a presence in Western Tidewater for nearly a decade — an effort largely dependent on funding from outside agencies.

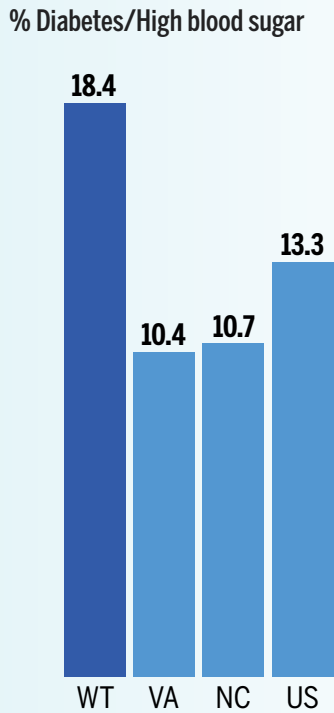
“What we need now is a model that is more sustainable,” Dr. Lieb says.

To achieve that, the EVMS project will provide pilot data about the scope of the problem. That information will be utilized in future applications for research opportunities and extramural funding mechanisms geared to patient-oriented outcomes and community interventions.

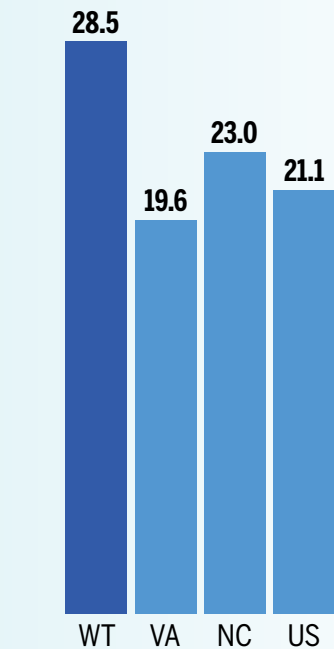
A key component of the project, Dr. Lieb says, is widespread diabetes screenings — combined

(continued on page 19)

Prevalence of diabetes in the service area compared to state and national benchmark data



Death rate due to diabetes per 100,000 (age-adjusted)



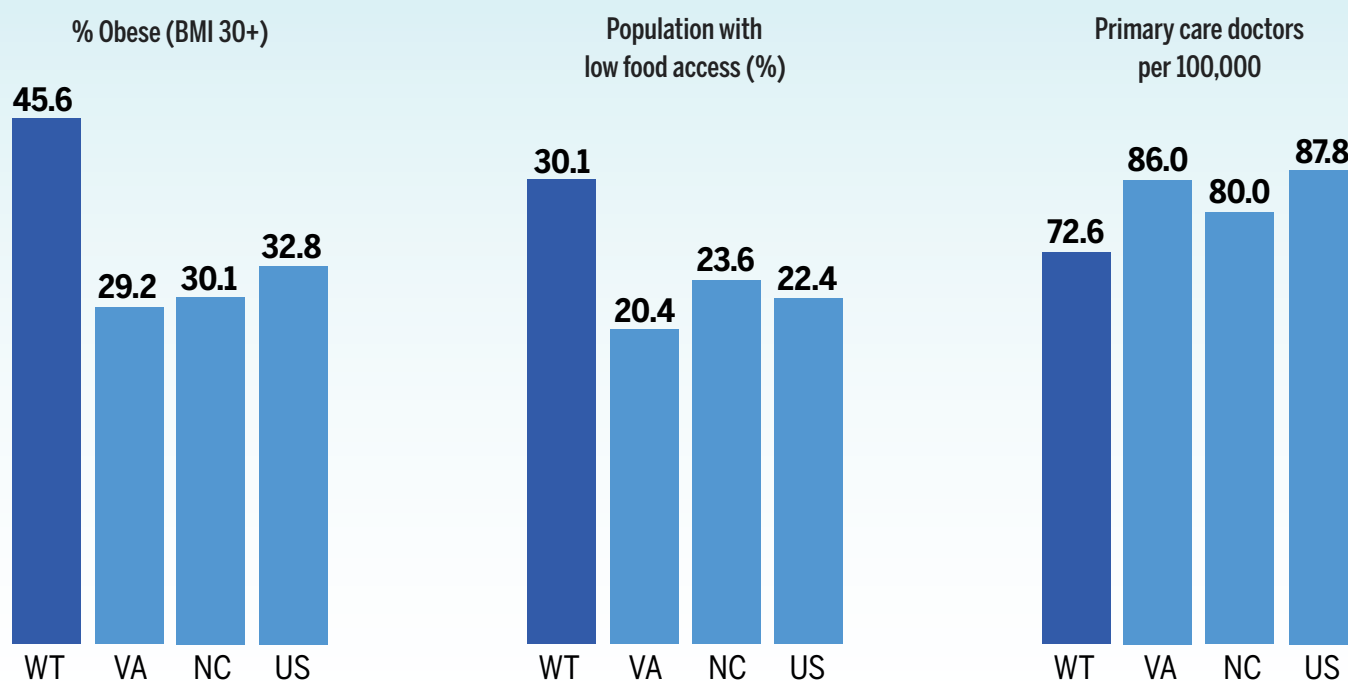
Source: Obici Healthcare Foundation Service Area, 2018 Community Health Needs Assessment. Data collected in 2017.



“Screenings are wonderful, but the most important thing is to make sure that people who screen positive are connected with the resources and the care that they need.”

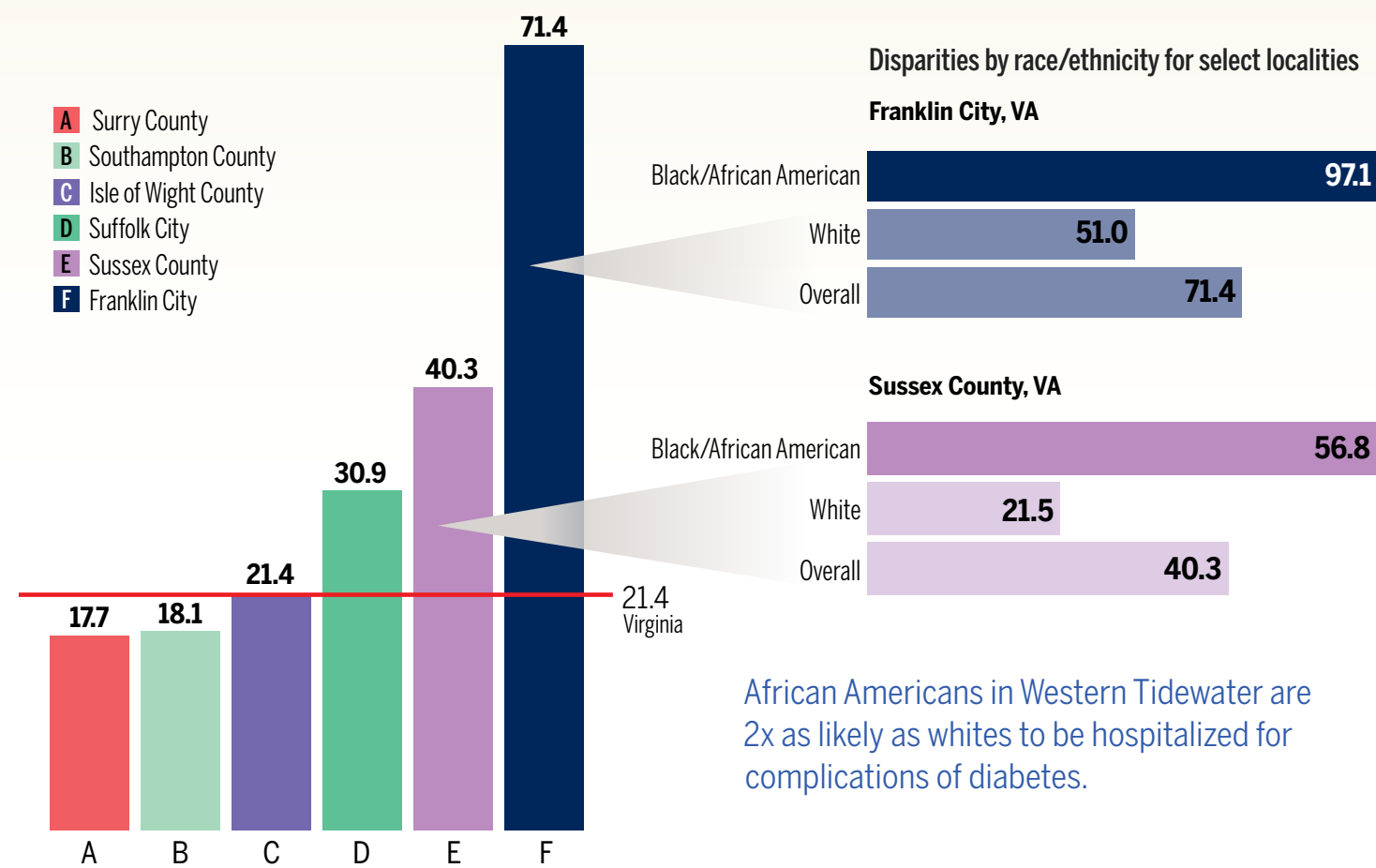
David Lieb, MD

Risk factors for diabetes in the service area compared to state and national benchmark data



Source: Obici Healthcare Foundation Service Area, 2018 Community Health Needs Assessment. Data collected in 2017.

Age-adjusted hospitalization rate per 10,000 due to type 2 diabetes, age 18+ years, in the service area



Source: Virginia Health Information, measurement period: 2017–2019, obtained via the Community Indicators Dashboard, ghrconnects.org. Sussex, Southampton and Surry Counties include all zip codes within each locality. Data not available for Gates County.

(continued from page 17)

with follow-up so that individuals who screen positive are connected with the resources and the care that they need.

Another key focus will be on “super utilizers” — patients who are frequently hospitalized or seek emergency care for diabetes-related complications. “Our hope is that we can connect those individuals with care coordinators, diabetes educators, help with transportation and give them as much of a leg up as possible to help reduce healthcare touch points,” Dr. Lieb says.

The project involves a range of partners both at EVMS and at Sentara Healthcare. For instance, EVMS students, residents and fellows will assist with data

collection. In return, they will accumulate valuable exposure to research methods.

Sentara has long recognized that diabetic patients in Suffolk and the surrounding area have higher rates of hospitalization, says Michael Genco, Vice President of Medical Affairs at Sentara Obici Hospital.

“We are very excited to partner with EVMS to help improve care for our patients with diabetes and pre-diabetics,” Dr. Genco says. “Dr. Lieb’s study is a great way to start addressing this healthcare problem.”

Dr. Genco says the patient education component of the EVMS study dovetails with the hospital’s Community Health Outreach Program that provides ongoing health education for recently discharged patients with chronic diseases like diabetes. □

Other collaborators involved in the project include:

Maryanne Gathambo, MPH, Director of Community-Engaged Learning

Amy Paulson, MPH, Director of the Consortium for Infant and Child Health (CINCH)

Destiny Carrington of Northampton High School and Jaquala Crocker of I.C. Norcom High School learn casting techniques from Hanna Glass, MSA Class of 2022.





PHOTO ESSAY

Health Sciences Academy

Photos by DOUG GARDNER

Portsmouth and Eastern Shore high school students learn about a broad spectrum of careers in medicine



Above: Kimayah Nelson of Churchland High School and Wesley Bias-Saunders of I.C. Norcom High School join Joseph Brown, Dev Patel and Jasmine Casteneda-Cora of Northampton High School in learning CPR safety from Christina Gates, DO, and the EVMS Bystander CPR team.

Right: Northampton High School student Jaliel Savage watches as volunteers teach the basics of ultrasound technology.





Left: During the camp, students learned about myriad career paths in medicine. On the final day, Northampton High School students Jalon Burton, Dev Patel and Kyla Robberecht presented on pediatric geneticists.

GENEROSITY IN ACTION

Health Sciences Academy tuition for students is free thanks to the generosity of Paul E. Bibbins Jr., PhD (Biomedical Sciences PhD '86), Betty Bibbins, MD (MD '82), Kurt McCammon, MD, Devine Chair in Genitourinary Reconstructive Surgery and Professor and Chair of Urology, and Carol McCammon, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine. To support programs like the Health Sciences Academy, please contact EVMS Development at 757.965.8500.



Above: Naa'shra Aikens of I.C. Norcom High School and Emily Layola of Churchland High School get hands-on practice with the laparoscopic surgery trainer.

Left: Churchland High School student Jules Dalton performs a patient exam with Bill Stephany, an EVMS standardized patient.



Support the Health Sciences Academy at evms.edu/HSAgiving



Dr. Abuhamad is a physician-scientist-educator who is recognized internationally for his expertise and leadership in maternal-fetal medicine, ultrasound, prenatal diagnosis, global outreach and patient safety.

CHANGING of the GUARD

Alfred Abuhamad, MD, is named EVMS' Interim President,
Provost and Dean of the School of Medicine

Story by MARY WESTBROOK | *Photos by* DOUG GARDNER

When Richard V. Homan, MD, retired last summer, EVMS' Board of Visitors turned to a respected and familiar face to fill the school's top leadership role.

Alfred Abuhamad, MD, a physician-scientist-educator, is recognized internationally for his expertise and leadership in maternal-fetal medicine, ultrasound, prenatal diagnosis, global outreach and patient safety. A passionate advocate for health equity, Dr. Abuhamad is known for his ability to bring people together to effect positive, lasting change, whether in the classroom, hospital or boardroom.

His new role as EVMS' Interim President, Provost and Dean of the School of Medicine requires innovative thinking and problem-solving skills, experience leading dynamic teams through challenges and opportunities, a passion

for people and a vision for the future of medical education.

Those who know him best say Dr. Abuhamad is more than ready for the job.

With nearly 30 years' experience as a faculty member and member of EVMS senior leadership, Dr. Abuhamad already is in tune with the school's community-focused mission and deeply invested in the institution's next steps, says Bruce Waldholtz, MD, Rector of the EVMS Board of Visitors.

"Dr. Abuhamad is universally and deeply admired, respected and trusted by the EVMS faculty, residents, fellows and students who have been lucky enough to work with him," Dr. Waldholtz says. "He has gotten off to an inspired beginning. He is listening and learning as we approach the next chapter in EVMS' long history of serving our community and educating the next generation of healthcare providers."

Shortly after assuming his new role, Dr. Abuhamad joined Old Dominion President Brian Hemphill, PhD, and Norfolk State University President Javaune Adams-Gaston, PhD, in signing a memorandum of understanding to develop Virginia's first school of public health. The ONE School of Public Health represents an important step forward in addressing pressing health inequities, Dr. Abuhamad says.



**“
OF ALL OF THE
LEADERS I’VE
WORKED WITH,
DR. ABUHAMAD
IS THE MOST
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CLEAR THAT HE
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PEOPLE, AND
HIS DECISIONS
REFLECT THAT
CARE AND
ATTENTION.”**

Judette Louis, MD, MPH
Chair and Associate
Professor of Obstetrics
and Gynecology, Morsani
College of Medicine

Dr. Abuhamad earned his medical degree from the American University of Beirut in 1985 before completing his residency in 1989 in obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Miami School of Medicine. He then completed a fellowship in maternal-fetal medicine in 1991 at the University of Miami and a second fellowship in ultrasound and prenatal diagnosis in 1992 at Yale School of Medicine. He came to EVMS later that year and has served as the Mason C. Andrews Chair in Obstetrics and Gynecology, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Radiology, Chair of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Vice Dean for Clinical Affairs and Medical Director of EVMS Medical Group.

“What is special about EVMS is our mission, and the core of our mission is about caring for the community and improving health outcomes while reducing health disparities,” Dr. Abuhamad says. “We’ve done so much good in this area since EVMS’ founding almost 50 years ago, and there’s more work to be done. As Interim President and Provost, I’m focused on our mission, our community partnerships and on ensuring that we as a school are adequately resourced to deal with the challenges of healthcare for the next 50 years.”

Craig Derkay, MD, the Fine Family Professor in Otolaryngology, Professor of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery and President of the Faculty Senate, says the group is “very enthusiastic” about working with Dr. Abuhamad.

“Dr. Abuhamad is a well-recognized leader at EVMS, and faculty members have faith and trust in him,” Dr. Derkay says. “As a longtime faculty member, he’s one of us.”

Francis Counselman, MD (MD ’83, Emergency Medicine

Residency ’86), the Chidester Endowed Chair of Emergency Medicine and Professor and Chairman of Emergency Medicine, calls Dr. Abuhamad a “gifted clinician, academician and researcher.”

“He is a pleasure to work with in any capacity,” Dr. Counselman says. “He is a team player, consistently tries to find consensus and is the ultimate professional. He is the right man at the right time.”

Key community partners agree. Howard P. Kern, President and CEO of Sentara Healthcare, calls Dr. Abuhamad a “dedicated, collaborative and forward-thinking physician and executive.”

“Dr. Alfred Abuhamad and I have worked together for almost 30 years,” Mr. Kern says. “He has shown himself to be a highly effective leader for Eastern Virginia Medical School. I am honored to work collaboratively with Dr. Abuhamad and the rest of the EVMS leadership to address both the immediate and long-term health professional training and care needs for those whom we are privileged to serve.”

Jim Dahling, President and CEO of CHKD Health System, says Dr. Abuhamad is “a natural leader and has been a valuable partner to CHKD for decades.”

“He has been a respected clinician, researcher, mentor, teacher and advocate within the healthcare community since he arrived at EVMS, and we are inspired by his spirit of collaboration and vision for the future,” Mr. Dahling says. “We look forward to every opportunity to build and enhance the critical dynamic between CHKD and the medical school, and we are certain that Dr. Abuhamad’s leadership will be felt in many ways throughout the healthcare community as well as our entire region.”

Servant leader

As a leader in his field, Dr. Abuhamad has earned an international reputation for his research, advocacy and his willingness to give back.

Glynis Harvey, Chief Executive officer of the American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM), has worked closely with Dr. Abuhamad on a number of multilayered initiatives, including a year-long effort to encourage widespread use of ultrasound (“Ultrasound First”) to minimize radiation exposure with other imaging modalities. She calls Dr. Abuhamad, who has served in a number of AIUM leadership posts including President and Executive Committee member, “thoughtful, gentle, collaborative, strategic and inclusive.”

“Dr. Abuhamad has been a key leader in the ultrasound space and a luminary at the AIUM,” says Ms. Harvey, noting that Dr. Abuhamad has helped plan and implement awareness campaigns and events for the group and also serves as co-director of the Advanced OB-GYN Ultrasound seminar, AIUM’s most successful and longest running course.

Beryl Benacerraf, MD, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Professor of Radiology at Harvard Medical School, has worked with Dr. Abuhamad on many projects over the last two decades. She says she often is struck by his “impeccable judgment and ability to focus.”

“What’s most impressive about Dr. Abuhamad is his ability to see the forest and not get lost in the trees,” Dr. Benacerraf says. “He’s objective but also kind, and he has a big heart. That’s what makes him a great leader.”

Dr. Abuhamad also established the International Society of Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynecology’s outreach program and has led several ultrasound training missions to under-resourced communities in Haiti, Ghana and Somaliland. Those efforts made a profound impression.

“The outreach activities to remote areas around the world with scant resources afforded me the opportunity and the privilege to meet a lot of people and train faculty, midwives and students,” Dr. Abuhamad says. “I built strong relationships that lasted a lifetime, but the experiences also have allowed me to see the other side of healthcare and how important it is to share the resources we have. My ability to share my knowledge has been the most important part of my career.”

That impulse to reach out is also reflected in the many outside leadership positions Dr. Abuhamad has held. He is a past President of both the Society of Ultrasound in Medical Education and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM). While serving in the latter role, he worked closely with Judette Louis, MD, MPH, Chair and Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of South Florida’s Morsani College of Medicine and Associate Professor in the school’s College of Public Health.

“Of all of the leaders I’ve worked with, Dr. Abuhamad

is the most pragmatic and thoughtful,” says Dr. Louis, SMFM’s Immediate Past-President. “It’s clear that he cares about people, and his decisions reflect that care and attention.”

Dr. Abuhamad has extended that same care to his research and writing. He is part of a national team of researchers studying the human placenta during early pregnancy. The project is supported by a \$2.7 million grant from the National Institutes of Health. He is the author of several books and book chapters and more than 180 peer-reviewed journal articles. One of his books, “Practical Guide to Fetal Echocardiography,” won the Book of the Year Award in 2019 from the British Medical Association, and his free, open-access e-book, “Ultrasound in Obstetrics & Gynecology: A Practical Approach,” has been translated into 10 languages and downloaded and utilized by healthcare teams around the world.

Joanne Stone, MD, President-Elect of SMFM, says it is part of Dr. Abuhamad’s nature to give back.

“He comes up with amazing ideas, brings the best people together, oversees the project without micromanaging and then gives others the credit,” says Dr. Stone, Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Science at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. “His contributions are remarkable, but he’s still so humble and generous with his time. It’s just who he is.”

Dr. Abuhamad is equally dedicated to clinical care and education. He is the founder and past Chair of the Council for Patient Safety in Women’s Health Care and founder of the Ob Right Program, a nationally recognized program in patient safety and quality. He has received numerous national and international awards, including the 2019 Outstanding Faculty Award, the Commonwealth of Virginia’s premier honor for education.

Beyond any single initiative, however, Dr. Abuhamad says he is focused on the entire campus community and the critical role EVMS plays in Hampton Roads.

“I look forward to making decisions that are in line with the core values of who we are and why we are here and to being a servant leader to our faculty, staff, residents and students,” says Dr. Abuhamad. “We have a moral responsibility to care for our most vulnerable citizens and to reduce health disparities in our community. I look forward to working collaboratively with our healthcare partners to effect positive change. Together, we can make a significant difference.” □



**DR. ABUHAMAD IS
UNIVERSALLY AND DEEPLY
ADMIRERED, RESPECTED AND
TRUSTED BY THE EVMS
FACULTY, RESIDENTS,
FELLOWS AND STUDENTS
WHO HAVE BEEN LUCKY
ENOUGH TO WORK WITH
HIM. HE HAS GOTTEN OFF
TO AN INSPIRED BEGINNING.”**

Bruce Waldholtz, MD
Rector, EVMS Board of Visitors



Watch Dr. Abuhamad’s video at
evms.edu/DrAbuhamad



Dr. Richard V. Homan (left) accepts the 2019 Institutional Excellence Award from the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education alongside Mekbib Gameda, EVMS' Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion, and Marcus L. Martin, MD (MD '76), former member of the school's Board of Visitors and EVMS' first African-American graduate.

DR. RICHARD V. HOMAN RETIRES

Nearly a decade ago, Richard V. Homan, MD, stepped into the role of EVMS' President, Provost and Dean of the School of Medicine with an ambitious set of goals.

He wanted to amplify the great work already being done around campus and create new opportunities in research, education and clinical care. He envisioned EVMS as a nationally ranked institution deeply invested in and shaped by the community it serves. He knew EVMS could attract top talent and bring in the voices of professionals who were historically underrepresented in medical and healthcare education, including people of color and women.

By the time Dr. Homan retired in August 2021, he had achieved those goals and much more.

During his tenure, EVMS saw record enrollment and stellar academic performance, earned national plaudits for its diversity efforts, saw growth in research and patient care initiatives, drew historic philanthropic support and built strong financial reserves. He also led EVMS through the first 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic, helping to ensure a continuity of operations and the safety of the school community.

"Dr. Homan leaves EVMS in great shape with strong foundational footing in education, research and clinical care," says Alfred

Abuhamad, MD, Interim President, Provost and Dean of the School of Medicine. "He oversaw significant expansion in educational programs and championed diversity in our student core and faculty. His vast experience in leadership and management enhanced EVMS' standing regionally and nationally."

Highlights of Dr. Homan's tenure:

Diversity and inclusion as a priority. Dr. Homan established EVMS' first Diversity and Inclusion office and recruited the school's inaugural Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion, Mekbib Gameda. The school achieved national recognition for its effort. The National Association



DR. HOMAN LEAVES EVMS IN GREAT SHAPE WITH STRONG FOUNDATIONAL FOOTING IN EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND CLINICAL CARE.”

Alfred Abuhamad, MD, *Interim President, Provost and Dean of the School of Medicine*



During his time as leader of EVMS, Dr. Homan prioritized the school's long-standing community-engagement efforts and encouraged students, residents, faculty and staff to actively participate in outreach efforts around Hampton Roads.

of Diversity Officers in Higher Education awarded EVMS its 2019 Institutional Excellence Award for “demonstrating measurable progress in promoting and sustaining innovative diversity efforts within [the] campus community.” In its 2021 rankings, U. S. News & World Report named EVMS in a tie at No. 39 for Most Diverse Medical Schools, placing the institution ahead of all other Virginia schools.

Service as a continuing commitment. Dr. Homan embraced the school's community roots and mission by prioritizing the school's

19 Community-Engaged Learning initiatives and more than 390 local partners. Under Dr. Homan's leadership, EVMS faculty, staff and student leaders chose “Live Humble: Practicing with Cultural Humility” as a five-year Quality Enhancement Plan in 2020. In a preliminary report, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges called EVMS' QEP a model for other institutions.

Growth in a strategic manner. On Dr. Homan's watch, EVMS revised and implemented an updated medical school curriculum

and added a total of 18 graduate degree programs within the School of Health Professions, more than doubling its number of degree programs. Combined enrollment in the School of Health Professions and the School of Medicine surged from 877 students in fiscal year 2010 to 1,472 students in fiscal year 2021. EVMS also added several residencies and fellowships and 10 clinical specialty programs in partnership with Sentara Healthcare. In 2021, U.S. News & World Report recognized EVMS with six prestigious rankings, the most in the school's history. □

FEATURE

Our Global DNA

Stories from EVMS'
global community

Stories by DOUG GARDNER, VIRGINIA HILTON,
JENNIFER MCCARREL, MA, APR, and
MARY WESTBROOK

Photography by ERIC LUSHER

Digital Art by JOHN COMERFORD

Members of EVMS' diverse and strong international community include, clockwise from left, Dr. Julius Nyalwidhe, Dr. Elias Siraj, Dr. Elza Mylona, Dr. Sunita Dodani and Dr. Margaret Baumgarten.



“I CAN SEE MYSELF HERE. I CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.”

These were thoughts Elza Mylona, PhD, MBA, had in 2013 when she interviewed at EVMS. Already a researcher with a national reputation and two decades' experience in the fields of medical education and faculty affairs and development, Dr. Mylona sensed an openness among the EVMS team, a willingness to take risks and try new ideas.

“When you interview in academia, there is often a stiffness and a resistance to change,” says Dr. Mylona, now Vice Provost of Faculty Affairs and Institutional Effectiveness. “You present an idea and you hear 1,000 different reasons it won't work. I found a different attitude here. It was refreshing.”

Margaret Baumgarten, MD, the Charles F. Burroughs Jr. Chair in Family and Community Medicine, Chief Quality Officer of EVMS Medical Group and Professor of Family and Community Medicine, had a similar experience. She remembers going home from her job interview at EVMS in 1999 with an overwhelming sense of belonging and purpose.

“I told my husband, ‘These are my people,’” she says. “I knew there was no place else I wanted to be.”

In many ways, Dr. Mylona and Dr. Baumgarten couldn't be more different.

Dr. Mylona spent her childhood surrounded by nature and the arts, first on a verdant island off the coast of Greece and then in the bustling metropolis that is Athens. Dr. Baumgarten was raised in the former USSR. She owned three pairs of shoes and three sets of clothes, exactly enough — and no more — to cycle through the seasons. They both dreamed of something different in their lives. They both harnessed their distinct life experiences and considerable expertise to effect lasting change at EVMS.

In this they are not alone.

EVMS is shaped and made better by the contributions of faculty, staff, students, residents, providers and researchers from around the world. Beyond the school and Hampton Roads, foreign-born healthcare professionals also address a national workforce gap. The Association of American Medical Colleges has projected a shortfall of up to 90,400 doctors by 2025, many of them in primary care. Meanwhile, the Journal of the American Medical Association estimates that nearly 30% of physicians working in the U.S. today were born in other countries. In addition, 42% of researchers at the top seven U.S. cancer research centers are immigrants, according to the National Foundation for American Policy.

On an institutional level, members of EVMS' international community help bring the school's mission to life. Traveling from another country to start a new chapter takes confidence and courage. Foreign-born professionals bring their own skills, experiences and perspectives. They introduce new ideas and ways of moving through the world. Their contributions make the school stronger and better suited to serve the people of southeastern Virginia.

Here are some of their stories.

Growing up in the former Soviet Union, Dr. Margaret Baumgarten, pictured with St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, owned limited material items. Today, she is the Charles F. Burroughs Jr. Chair in Family and Community Medicine and the Chief Quality Officer at EVMS Medical Group.



Watch Dr. Baumgarten's video at
evms.edu/DrBaumgarten

“This is not just where we work. It’s where we live.”

Margaret Baumgarten, MD

The Charles F. Burroughs Jr. Chair in Family and Community Medicine

Chief Quality Officer, EVMS Medical Group

Professor of Family and Community Medicine

MOSCOW, RUSSIA

R

ed.

For some, it is the color of love and of passion. For Margaret Baumgarten, MD, it was the color of censorship and confinement, an iron curtain that hung around her home country of the Soviet Union and isolated its people from the rest of the world.

Nothing foreign was allowed — especially American. No foreign news. No foreign books. No magazines or catalogues selling American clothes, music or ideals.

She and her brother never went without food or the essentials, but it was a meager and modest upbringing. She owned three pairs of shoes and three sets of clothes. Her winter coat looked exactly like that of nearly every other child who lived on her street.

Yet there were some things even the iron curtain couldn’t keep out — dreams of independence, of freedom, of equal rights, as well as a firm belief that life could be better.

Dr. Baumgarten grew up thinking that anything was possible for herself. You can’t change the country, she learned at an early age, but you can change how you lead your life.

“While I may have not had a lot of stuff,” she says, “I was always surrounded by love and support and the belief of my parents that I could do whatever I wanted to do in this world.”

For her, that meant becoming a doctor.

She graduated from medical school in Moscow. There, she met her husband, Maxim Mirovski, MD. They came to the United States to complete their residencies and stayed to build their family, their careers.

Dr. Baumgarten, the Charles F. Burroughs Jr. Chair in

Family and Community Medicine and Professor of Family and Community Medicine, takes pride in raising her two children with the same values instilled in her by her parents.

“I want my kids to never be hungry, for them to always feel loved, to be happy with themselves, and to believe that they can be whatever they choose to be,” she says.

Those values are also what ultimately led her to leave private practice for a position at EVMS.

“At EVMS we see ourselves as being part of the community,” Dr. Baumgarten says. “So when we talk about the community, we are talking about ourselves. This is not just where we work. It’s where we live.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic swept the U.S., Dr. Baumgarten was uniquely positioned to lead the campus response. Along with her faculty appointment, Dr. Baumgarten is Chief Quality Officer of EVMS Medical Group, serving on the front lines of pandemic patient care and the early adoption of COVID-19 policies and procedures. She ushered in drive-thru testing sites and kept the campus updated on vaccination developments and safety standards.

She made herself available for virtual town halls and gave advice to students and employees about best practices and the ever-evolving pandemic. “That’s a good question” became her mantra.

“I’m an immigrant from the Soviet Union with an often-thick Russian accent, yet people have always trusted to bring their families to me for care and allow me to share my knowledge and expertise.

“That’s the beautiful thing about being American,” she says. “We have our differences and our problems, but we not only see the beauty of our differences, we welcome them.” – J.M.

“I feel driven to give back.”

Elias Siraj, MD

David L. Bernd Distinguished Chair of Cardiovascular and Diabetes

Chief of Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders

Director, EVMS Strelitz Diabetes Center

ADWA, ETHIOPIA

An oppressive heat settles over the thirsty earth. Angled peaks and ledges of flame-red rock jut up from the landscape. This is a countryside striking in its beauty and its heritage.

This is the “Land of Origins,” where diversity, tolerance and coexistence have been celebrated as a natural part of society for millennia. From around 1990 through late 2020, Ethiopia as a whole was in a period of relative stability, peace and economic growth, focusing on increasing tourism and developing its infrastructure, resources, education and healthcare. Yet, parts of the country were still plagued with brutal cross-border conflicts and oppressive domestic regimes, violent political uprisings and famines.

In late 2020, a civil war erupted in the Tigray region and has expanded to involve other regions. According to the United Nations, the conflict has led to thousands of deaths, displaced 1.7 million people, and resulted in charges of atrocities committed by government forces and their allies — ethnic cleansing and horrific sexual violence.

“Unfortunately, right now Ethiopia is again in extreme turmoil, particularly in the region I grew up in,” says Elias Siraj, MD, the David L. Bernd Distinguished Chair for Cardiovascular and Diabetes, Chief of Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders and Director of the EVMS Strelitz Diabetes Center. “This isn’t a time for the world

to be silent. With the help and support of the international community, I hope a political solution can be found so that the man-made famine can be averted and peace restored.”

Anyone growing up in Ethiopia with dreams of becoming a doctor understands the odds are stacked against them.

Dr. Siraj was one who defied them. The son of a high school principal, Dr. Siraj says his family was more fortunate than others. Still, the problems he saw growing up in Tigray impacted his life and helped fuel his passion for medicine and science. He was one of only 240 people in Ethiopia who were accepted to medical school the year he started — 240 out of 40 million.

Later, Dr. Siraj earned one of just five available scholarships to study Internal Medicine and get research training at the University of Leipzig in Germany. He spent six years training in Germany and was there to see the fall of the Berlin Wall. After completing his training, he matched in an Internal Medicine residency at the Cleveland Clinic and moved to the United States.

Today, Dr. Siraj is one of many physicians of Ethiopian origin practicing in the U.S. who return regularly to their country to lend a hand. He has traveled there every year for nearly two decades to teach medical students, residents and fellows; collaborate with diabetes researchers; and care for patients.

He has helped develop medical school curricula and provided insight into ongoing research.

He helped establish the country’s first endocrine fellowship training program, an important first step to increasing the number of trained endocrine experts in Ethiopia. Before that, Ethiopia had just three Western-trained specialists in diabetes and endocrinology. Today, the number is growing annually.


“There are a lot of challenges in managing diabetes in Ethiopia — the availability of affordable healthcare, insulin, other diabetes medicines and laboratory tests, particularly for poor people,” he says. “When it comes to diabetes, Ethiopia needs help in education, in research and in improving their patient care.”

Dr. Siraj was recently recognized internationally for his efforts to help Ethiopia, but awards and accolades are not what drives him.

“It is very important to me to get involved and help because I see it as a duty to a society that contributed to my success,” he says. “I grew up in a country that didn’t have a lot of resources, but I succeeded and now I feel driven to give back.”

Working at EVMS affords him that opportunity.

“EVMS allows me to do research in diabetes, participate in teaching the next generation of healthcare providers and care for patients in all walks of life, including those in underserved areas like the Western Tidewater region of Virginia,” Dr. Siraj says. “The sense of community connection here at EVMS is something you can’t find everywhere — it’s at the core of what we do.” — J.M.



Ethiopia is a country with a long-recorded history dating back about 4,000 years. It is Africa's second-most populous country with about 115 million people and is home to more than 80 ethno-linguistic nations. The Tigray region, where Dr. Elias Siraj grew up, is currently in the midst of a violent war and a man-made famine with more than 5 million people in desperate need of assistance. "An international investigation should be conducted to identify the responsible parties for the atrocities and make them accountable according to international laws," says Dr. Siraj, pictured with ancient obelisks in Axum, Ethiopia.

As a girl in Kenya, Maryanne Koech Gathambo, MPH, met luminaries such as Nelson Mandela. She often reflects on a TED Talk delivered by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," which emphasizes the importance of seeing people as individuals. "So much of life is about telling your own story, to the best of your ability," Ms. Gathambo says. "I try to empower others to do that, too."



Watch Ms. Gathambo's video at
evms.edu/Gathambo



“I want to be a
change agent.”

Maryanne Koech Gathambo,
MPH (MPH '13)

Director, Community-Engaged Learning
NAKURU, KENYA

“M

y childhood was just my childhood,” Maryanne Koech Gathambo, MPH (MPH '13), says. But others may find it more noteworthy.

Ms. Gathambo once presented bouquets to the humanitarians Nelson and Winnie Mandela. She shook hands with Richard Leakey, the conservationist, politician and writer. These brushes with luminaries were brought about by her father, a professor and government official.

“It didn’t feel unusual to meet someone like Mrs. Mandela at the time,” Ms. Gathambo says.

Those formative years, however, left an impression. Because of her parents, Ms. Gathambo connected early with people committed to social causes — justice, the environment and more. She saw them following their passions and helping their communities. She wanted to do that, too.

She came to the United States as a college student to study environmental science. The more she studied, the

more she realized the critical role public health plays in effecting lasting change.

“Public health became very interesting to me because if we don’t take care of people’s health needs, we cannot take care of our natural resources,” says Ms. Gathambo, who is pursuing her PhD in organizational leadership. “I want to be a change agent.”

She’s already fulfilling that role on campus. As Director of Community-Engaged Learning, Ms. Gathambo helps EVMS students make meaningful connections in Hampton Roads among community groups who most need access to reliable resources and information and the care of trusted providers.

“In Community-Engaged Learning, we see the brightest, the most passionate students,” she says. “These are people who want to make a difference. Interacting with them proves to me that we can all be from different cultures, but our similarities bring us together. It’s like Maya Angelou said: ‘We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike.’” — M.W.

“Things we are working on here will be of great significance back home in Kenya.”

Julius Nyalwidhe, PhD

*Associate Professor of Microbiology and Molecular Cell Biology,
Leroy T. Canoles Jr. Cancer Research Center at EVMS*

Director, George L. Wright Jr. Center for Biomedical Proteomics at EVMS

NAIROBI AND SIAYA, KENYA

A large, stylized orange letter 'W' graphic, which is the first letter of the word 'When' in the following paragraph. It has a textured, slightly grainy appearance.

hen he was growing up in Kenya, Julius Nyalwidhe, PhD, suffered multiple episodes of malaria and lost family and friends to the disease. Today, the new scourge for Kenya is cancer — the country's second leading cause of death.

“Just in the past few years, the family members of a lot of people I know have died from different types of cancers,” says Dr. Nyalwidhe, himself a cancer survivor.

As it happens, he is a scientific expert in both malaria and cancer.

Science was a favorite subject for a young Julius Nyalwidhe. By high school, he had earned the family nickname “Daktari,” which is Swahili for doctor. He chose to study malaria because of the disease's wide-scale impact on his community. Kenya's tropical environment is an ideal habitat for mosquito species that transmit the virulent malaria parasite, *Plasmodium falciparum*.

A scholarship drew him to Germany where he earned his PhD. His interest in malaria led to his work in studying malaria parasite proteins, the complex molecules that do most of the work in all cells and play a critical role in the development of diseases.

By the time a faculty position at EVMS attracted his interest in 2007, Dr. Nyalwidhe had become a pioneer in the burgeoning field of proteomics — the study of proteins to help with the diagnosis and treatment of disease. But the emphasis at

EVMS was not in malaria. It was in cancer.


The transition proved challenging for the protein scientist. He would be using many of the same tools but studying an entirely new disease.

“It was a very difficult decision,” he recalls of leaving his safe, federal job in Germany and moving with his family to the U.S.

“What helped me is that once I made that decision, it became clear that I was going to have to start from scratch,” he says. “That challenged me because it made me work very hard to be able to get up to the level of my contemporaries. So, in a way, it was rejuvenating. I also got a lot of support from here.”

Dr. Nyalwidhe is now widely respected in the world of proteomics for his work in cancer. Among the goals of his research is to develop a simple test for the early detection of prostate cancer when the disease is most treatable. He knows that the work he is doing at EVMS has global implications, particularly in developing countries such as Kenya where his seven surviving brothers and sisters still live.

“All of these things we are working on here will be of great significance back home in Kenya,” he says. “There is a lot of disparity in Kenya in terms of health, where if you don't have money, you can't get good medical care. It is very expensive. If we can come up with diagnostics for early detection of cancers — something that can function without expensive infrastructure — we can assist communities in developing countries and down to rural communities in the countryside.” — D.G.



Dr. Julius Nyalwidhe spent much of his career as a young researcher (pictured) exploring malaria parasite proteins. He has become a pioneer in the field of proteomics and is now a leading cancer researcher with an international reputation.



Watch Dr. Nyalwidhe's video at
evms.edu/DrNyalwidhe

When Dr. Elza Mylona was a child (pictured), she split her time between the island of Zakynthos in the Ionian Sea and Athens. The contrasts between the beauty of natural spaces and bustle of a major city left an impression. As Vice Provost of Faculty Affairs and Institutional Effectiveness, she works to ensure EVMS faculty have the tools and resources to find their own paths.



“I believe in being an authentic leader and having an authentic voice.”

Elza Mylona, PhD, MBA

Vice Provost, Faculty Affairs and Institutional Effectiveness

Professor of Internal Medicine

ZAKYNTHOS, GREECE

W

hen Dr. Mylona was a girl, her family could guess her emotions based on the songs she played on her classical guitar.

On the idyllic island of Zakynthos in the Ionian Sea and later in Athens, she would lose and then find herself in music, whether she was sad, exuberant or just about any state in between.

Given that early influence, it may be no surprise that Elza Mylona, PhD, MBA, has dedicated her professional life to helping people find their passions and then connecting them with the resources they need to become successful while feeling valued and supported.

As EVMS' Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Institutional Effectiveness, Dr. Mylona spearheads initiatives and programs centered on professional development and serves as a champion for faculty members. The role requires forward-looking and transformative thinking, as well as flexibility. No two members of the EVMS faculty have the same career goals or paths. No two must overcome the same obstacles.

“Junior faculty face different challenges than senior faculty,” she explains. “Women face different challenges than men. People of color and groups historically underrepresented in medical education face even more challenges. It's

important to see faculty members as individuals and to listen to them, to have a true back-and-forth dialogue, as we work toward solutions and new ideas together.”

The key characteristic of her relationship with any faculty member? Trust.

“In the context of my work, trust also means vulnerability,” she explains. “There is so much talent in medical education. That's a wonderful thing, but it creates competition and that can lead to doubt and defensiveness. It takes vulnerability for a faculty member to say, ‘This is an area where I want to be better. This is a place I can use some help.’ But that is the mindset that helps people and institutions grow and develop. We have to earn that trust in each other. It takes transparency, professionalism and often courage.”

Dr. Mylona knows about courage and risk-taking. After securing her bachelor's degree in Athens and spending a decade in higher education, she packed two suitcases and moved to the United States alone — to her parents' dismay. While working toward her doctorate, an advisor introduced her to the world of medical education. Within a few years, she was at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine, collaborating with some of the brightest minds in medical education and faculty development. She was hooked.

“As professionals,” she says, “we bring our

entire selves with us into every interaction, the good qualities and the qualities that can get in the way of our advancement. I try to listen to people. I don't ever want to give prescriptive advice. Instead, I want to offer ideas on the possible paths they might take to achieve their goals.”

Dr. Mylona has distinguished herself nationally and internationally in the areas of curriculum development, leadership development and talent management. She was recruited to EVMS in 2013 after a decade at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. In the intervening years, she has amplified and enhanced existing faculty development efforts and wellness programs in alignment with the school's strategic plan while creating new initiatives, building on her national reputation as a thought leader in the field and serving in outside leadership roles for groups such as the Association of American Medical Colleges.

She takes the responsibility of mentoring others and modeling positive interactions seriously. “I believe in being an authentic leader and having an authentic voice,” she says. “That means knowing who you are and what your limitations are — and not changing who you are based on the scenario or who else is in the room. It's a lesson I learned early in my career and have tried to share with others.” —M.W.

“International medical graduates see problems from different perspectives.”

Luis Borda, MD

Dermatology resident

CHIMBOTE, PERU

Cartoons, playgrounds and games of tag are childhood staples for many kids, but growing up in Chimbote, Peru, Luis Borda, MD, had a different extracurricular hobby: heading to local hospitals alongside his mom and two uncles.

“My mom was a nurse and used to take me to the ER,” says Dr. Borda. “At 7 years old, I helped her draw blood from regular patients and started IVs.”

Seeing people in pain and being able to make a difference in their lives spoke to him and inspired him to be a physician. During medical school at Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia in Lima, Peru, those experiences served him well. Situations that gave some students pause didn’t faze Dr. Borda.

“After seeing severed limbs and the chaos of an emergency room,” he says, “I was well prepared for the blood and gore of trauma.”

In his last year of medical school, a rotation at a public hospital in Lima illuminated another challenge Dr. Borda wanted to tackle: equity in healthcare, including the effects of limited resources on patient care.

“How can you help people when you don’t have the tools

to do so?” Dr. Borda says. “There were many occasions when we needed a device or a certain medicine to save someone’s life, but it wasn’t available.”

The situation forced Dr. Borda and his colleagues to be resourceful.

“We once had a patient who was in critical condition and needed a central line, but the hospital was out of the device we needed to place it.” Dr. Borda remembered that he had a spare central-line kit from a patient who passed before they were able to use it. “We were able to place that device and prevent the patient from any further damage.”

Thanks to his ingenuity and experience — along with his extensive research efforts and more than 50 publications — Dr. Borda soon became one of only five international medical graduates (IMG) in the U.S. to match in dermatology after graduation. That representation matters.

“International medical graduates see problems from different perspectives,” Dr. Borda says. “I encountered different types of cases throughout medical school, along with doing basic science research coupled with clinical research. Those experiences allow me to see a problem in different ways, as a scientist, as a physician, as somebody that can work with different types of resources.” – V.H.



At 7 years old, Dr. Luis Borda would sometimes accompany his mother, an emergency room nurse, to the hospital. During his own medical training in Peru, he saw how limited resources could adversely affect care. Those formative experiences cemented his drive to become one of five international medical graduates in the U.S. to match in dermatology after graduation. He is pictured with the Peruvian flag and a church in the Barranco neighborhood of Lima.



Watch Dr. Borda's video at
evms.edu/DrBorda

Dr. Zeinab Kassem says her childhood in Beirut fired her passion to advocate for and serve women. "The patriarchy and paternalism are quite pervasive in everyday interactions," says Dr. Kassem, pictured with a Martyrs' Square statue in Beirut.



Watch Dr. Kassem's video at
evms.edu/DrKassem



**“I get to advocate
for women on a
daily basis.”**

Zeinab Kassem, MD

Obstetrics and Gynecology resident

BEIRUT, LEBANON



A

s Zeinab Kassem, MD, stands in the Jones Institute Atrium, it's clear that her life has come full circle.

Dr. Kassem's parents traveled from Lebanon to Norfolk 30 years ago, seeking a child of their own. Now, that child —

Dr. Kassem — is back in Norfolk and practicing medicine as an Obstetrics and Gynecology resident at EVMS.

“I grew up hearing stories of my parents' struggle with infertility,” she says. “How they traveled all the way to the U.S. all those years ago seeking fertility treatments, and how their experience at the EVMS Jones Institute for Reproductive Medicine was life-changing. My decision to pursue medicine and OB-GYN as a specialty was the organic result of the convergence of my own personal interests and my parents' history.”

Growing up in Lebanon also shaped her desire to serve and support women in medicine.

“The patriarchy and paternalism are quite pervasive in everyday interaction both inside and outside of the

hospital,” Dr. Kassem says. “These experiences fueled my drive to pick a career path where I get to advocate for women on a daily basis.”

As a queer woman, Dr. Kassem also is sensitive to the subtle heteronormative and discriminatory interactions that people belonging to sexual minorities have to navigate. “I try my best to strive to effect change,” she says, “even if on a small scale to make these interactions slightly more palpable.” For example, she successfully advocated for EVMS clinic intake sheets to be more gender neutral and inclusive.

Shortly after arriving on campus, she was on a phone call with her parents. They told her where to find a brick donated in her honor in the Jones Institute Atrium. “It was an emotional moment,” Dr. Kassem says. Seeing and feeling her name etched in the ground filled her with a sense of gratitude.

“Knowing that my parents never gave up their dream to have a child and that they wanted their effort to be honored in such a permanent way was very meaningful.” – V.H.

“I always fight for the right thing – even when it gets me in trouble.”

Sunita Dodani, MBBS, PhD

*Founding Director, EVMS-Sentara Healthcare Analytics and Delivery Science Institute
Professor of Internal Medicine*

KARACHI, PAKISTAN



fter Sunita Dodani, MD, PhD, contracted polio when she was 2 years old, her parents' friends panicked. "People told my father to put me in an orphanage," she says. "They said, 'No one will marry her. What is she good for?'"

Dr. Dodani's parents didn't listen. Instead they prepared her for the challenges she would face. "I was already a female in a country where females are not treated equally and as a Hindu, a minority," she says. "After polio impaired my mobility, I had a disability in a community that did not understand how to live with people who have special needs."

Her mother became her champion. "My mom stood in front of chauvinistic men and said, 'My daughter will become a doctor,'" Dr. Dodani says. "She had no formal education herself. She couldn't read, but she knew I could do something more with my life."

Dr. Dodani focused on that message. In school, she ignored taunts and endured indignities — activities and infrastructure not made for people with disabilities. Her resolve sometimes turned to anger. Once, a schoolmate belittled another girl's


appearance. Dr. Dodani slapped the boy.

"I always fight for the right thing — even when it gets me in trouble," Dr. Dodani says. "My experiences gave me courage. They helped me to develop my leadership skills."

That determination took Dr. Dodani to Aga Khan University Medical College in Karachi, Pakistan, where she earned her medical degree, completed her residency in family medicine and trained in preventive cardiology. She earned a master's degree in Epidemiology and Community Health from the Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada, followed by a PhD in chronic diseases from the University of Pittsburgh.

In 2017, she joined EVMS as Professor of Internal Medicine and Founding Director of the EVMS-Sentara Healthcare Analytics and Delivery Science Institute. In leading the institute, she has overseen the distribution of nearly \$400,000 in funding to researchers and played a pivotal role in creating a statewide registry to track the effects of COVID-19 in Virginia.

Through all of her successes, her parents' words ring true. "The thing that kept me going was something my father used to say," she explains. "Don't pay attention to what other people say. Keep a high spirit. Believe in yourself." — M.W.



Dr. Sunita Dodani contracted polio when she was 2 years old. As a younger woman (pictured), she was taunted and dismissed. She turned her challenges into resolve by entering the medical field and becoming a leader in her field.

Chart their journeys

The journey to find your professional home isn't always a straight path, but each point is important. We asked the members of EVMS' international community profiled in this issue to share some of the key places along their own journeys — the areas that informed their perspectives and helped shaped who they are today.

Elza Mylona, PhD, MBA

- ★ Zakynthos (Greek island)
- ★ Athens, Greece
- ★ Los Angeles
- ★ Long Island, N.Y.
- Norfolk, Va.



Zeinab Kassem, MD

- Beirut, Lebanon
- Detroit
- Norfolk, Va.



Julius Nyalwidhe, PhD

- Nairobi, Kenya
- Siaya, Siaya County, Kenya
- Göttingen, Niedersachsen, Germany
- Marburg, Hessen, Germany
- Norfolk, Va.



Margaret Baumgarten, MD

- ▲ Moscow, Russia
- ▲ Detroit
- ▲ Williamsburg, Va.
- Virginia Beach, Va.



Luis Borda, MD

- ◆ Chimbote, Peru
- ◆ St. Augustine, Fla.
- ◆ Lima, Peru
- ◆ Miami
- Norfolk, Va.



Maryanne Koech Gathambo, MPH

- Nairobi, Kenya
- Nakuru, Kenya
- Lynchburg, Va.
- Norfolk, Va.




Elias Siraj, MD

- ◆ Adwa, Ethiopia
- ◆ Gondar, Ethiopia
- ◆ Leipzig, Germany
- ◆ Cleveland
- ◆ Philadelphia
- Norfolk, Va.



Sunita Dodani, MD, PhD

- ▲ Karachi, Pakistan
- ▲ Phoenix
- ▲ Denver
- ▲ Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
- ▲ Pittsburgh
- ▲ Augusta, Ga.
- ▲ Kansas City, Kan.
- ▲ Jacksonville, Fla.
- Norfolk, Va.



EVMS program supports foreign-born residents

“Where are you from?”

“I want an American doctor.”

“What’s with the accent?”

If you are an immigrant provider or researcher working in U.S. healthcare today, the questions above can be all too common. While foreign-born healthcare professionals play a critical role in the U.S. system, they often face racial bias and prejudice in the communities they serve.

One EVMS program in particular is working to ensure immigrant providers have the resources they need to navigate these unfortunate realities and create lasting support systems from the start of their careers.

International medical graduates (IMGs) make up about 21 percent of residents and fellows at EVMS, a figure that’s in keeping with the national average. To help the large number of IMGs at EVMS adjust, the Graduate Medical Education team created a mandatory IMG boot camp.

“We started this program in 2017 because we had several requests to do an orientation program

to prepare these trainees for their programs and patients in the U.S.,” says LaConda Fanning, PsyD, RN, Director of GME Early Assessment and Mentoring and Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine.

“Our goals are to set them up for success as they begin their training in this new culture and for them to develop a support network of other IMGs at EVMS.”

The boot camp includes interactive training on diversity, interpersonal communication skills, creating a support system and using mindfulness to build resiliency.

Students also have a chance to role play with standardized patients. They work through scenarios such as patients being afraid to have a physician who is from another country and how to manage conflict with colleagues who mistakenly think they are better than foreign-born residents and fellows.

“The research shows the struggle of IMGs in regards to their professional development and identity and adjusting to the medical culture,” Dr. Fanning says. “To be able to practice different verbal and non-verbal communications and how it may reduce issues with patient interaction is significant.”

The voices captured in this issue represent just some of the people in EVMS’ vibrant international community. Read more stories, find additional photos and watch video interviews at evms.edu/OurGlobalDNA.



PICTURE THIS

Women's health e-book makes a global impact

IN HIS TRAVELS AROUND THE WORLD as a medical volunteer, Alfred Abuhamad, MD, Interim President, Provost and Dean of the School of Medicine, has seen firsthand how challenging it is for medical professionals to access reliable information on women's specialty healthcare needs. The experience led him to create "Ultrasound in Obstetrics & Gynecology: A Practical Approach," an open-access e-book that presents a comprehensive review of ultrasound in obstetrics and gynecology.

STARTLING TRUTH

295,000 women die each year during and following pregnancy and childbirth.

EVMS RESOURCE HELPS WOMEN RECEIVE BETTER CARE



75,000+

Direct downloads of Dr. Abuhamad's e-book from the EVMS website. The actual reach is beyond measure.



10 Translations from the English text

Downloads by Translation

 **6,138**
Spanish

 **2,177**
Chinese

 **1,900**
Vietnamese

 **1,855**
Korean

 **1,261**
Farsi

 **834**
Portuguese

 **745**
Italian

 **212**
Czech

Azerbaijani and Greek versions of the e-book also are available as of September 2021.

To download the e-book, visit evms.edu/ultrasoundbook.

Source: WHO Maternal Mortality Fact Sheet (Sept.19, 2019)

Great Expectations

A dedicated scientist receives EVMS' Doctor of Humane Letters



Dr. Bibbins on his family's farm on Virginia's Eastern Shore.

Story by SONJA BARISIC, APR | Photos by BRENDAN ASH and DOUG GARDNER

In June 1969, Paul Bibbins Jr., PhD (Biomedical Sciences PhD '86), and his older brother, George, visited their dying grandmother. George was about to deploy to Vietnam, and their grandmother told him: "Don't forget where you come from."

Those words have guided Dr. Bibbins throughout his life and 40-year career as a scientist, scholar, university president, dean, professor and executive who contributed to the scientific literature in reproductive endocrinology and left a mark on higher education.

Now retired and an EVMS alumni volunteer, Dr. Bibbins shared his grandmother's guidance with graduates in May when he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. Dr. Bibbins urged members of the Class of 2021 to remember their own roots and "foremost, don't forget that Eastern Virginia Medical School is your foundation."

He began his speech during the commencement ceremony by

announcing: "I should not be standing here today."

His father, Paul, dropped out of school in fourth grade. His mother, Lillie, left school in 10th grade. They worked hard as farm owners on Virginia's Eastern Shore. They also impressed upon Paul, George and sister Bea the value of education and made sure that field work didn't interfere with schoolwork.

"I remember my dad saying, 'We will help you earn your first degree. What you do after that is up to you,'" Dr. Bibbins says in an interview from the century-old farmhouse where he grew up outside Cape Charles and where he lives with his wife, Betty Bibbins, MD (MD '82), a member of the EVMS Board of Visitors. He was born in a second-floor bedroom, which he now uses as an office.

Dr. Bibbins and his siblings got those first degrees, plus master's degrees. After earning bachelor's and master's of science degrees in biology from

Virginia State University, he completed his medical technology training at Old Dominion University. “I was going to be a medical technologist for the rest of my life,” Dr. Bibbins says. “Then I found out about genetics.”

At the time he decided to pursue his PhD, Dr. Bibbins was a pioneering geneticist in Tidewater. “If people needed to have a chromosome study done, they would contact me,” he recalls.

Dr. Bibbins was a member of the first class of the Biomedical Sciences PhD program, administrated by EVMS and Old Dominion University. The broad-based program “gave me some direction of what I really was going to do for the rest of my life,” he says. “I had the education to do pretty much anything I wanted to do.”

Dr. Bibbins says he feels indebted to Gerald Pepe, PhD, in whose lab he worked during his studies. When Dr. Bibbins received his honorary degree, he requested that Dr. Pepe present the traditional hood over his academic dress.

Dr. Pepe, EVMS Foundation Chair in Biomedical Sciences, says he was not surprised that his former student accomplished so much.

“He was very quiet, very aware of the people around him and of how he could be helpful to his colleagues,” Dr. Pepe says. “He was a gentleman. I was always impressed with his humility, his ability to think and to ask good questions.”

Dr. Bibbins’ research interests are analyzing human chromosomes to detect abnormalities and studying sperm cells to look for exposure to toxic chemicals. He conducted a study looking at how sperm changed in Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange.

He joined Kentucky State University in 1988 as a biology professor before becoming Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and later Interim President. He also developed a summer program to acquaint eighth and ninth graders with career opportunities in healthcare.

In 2004, he became Dean of the Eastern Campus of Ohio University, where he turned around a campus facing budgetary problems and declining enrollment and started a youth summer program.

Leaving academia in December 2007, Dr. Bibbins moved back to the Eastern Shore. He served as Chief Financial Officer of DocuComp LLC in Cape Charles until 2017 and remains busy today. He sits on the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and Tunnel Commission, the Board of Directors of the United Way of Virginia’s Eastern Shore and the Northampton County School Board. As the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, Dr. Bibbins helped establish the Shore Delivery Corps to provide breakfast and lunch to Northampton County students.

For EVMS, he volunteers as an admissions interviewer and participated on the 2020 EVMS MD Alumni Scholarship Selection Committee. He’s also the liaison between Northampton County Public Schools and EVMS for the EVMS Health Sciences Academy, which helps students learn about healthcare careers. In addition, Dr. Bibbins is helping to plan an on-campus event for Black alumni next year.

In his spare time, he enjoys photography and traveling. He’s also writing his memories, a personal project that he plans to share one day with his wife and their son, Paul Bibbins III.

“I will never forget where I came from like my grandmother said to my brother,” Dr. Bibbins says, looking back on his life and career. “I’m from the country, and I will always be from the country.” □

“

I remember my dad saying, ‘We will get you your first degree. What you do after that is up to you.’”

Paul Bibbins Jr., PhD (Biomedical Sciences PhD '86)



Dr. Bibbins received EVMS’ Doctor of Humane Letters in May 2021.



Watch Dr. Bibbins’ video at evms.edu/DrBibbins.

Eastern Virginia Medical School's Graduate School Rankings

EVMS was **one of 12** schools in the US News & World Report listing with the highest representation of African American students in the 2020-2021 school year.

#39 in Most Diverse Medical Schools (tie)

(Best among all Va. schools)

#46 in Best Medical Schools: Primary Care (tie)

(Ahead of Duke, VCU)

#58 in Most Graduates Practicing in Medically Underserved Areas *(Better than UVA, VCU)*

#59 in Most Graduates Practicing in Primary Care Fields

(Ahead of UNC, UVA, VCU)

#88 in Best Medical Schools: Research (tie)

#90 in Most Graduates Practicing in Rural Areas (tie)



Brooke LeFors holds son, Liam, who is happy and healthy.



MY STORY

Family overcomes fear with faith and science

Story by VIRGINIA HILTON | Photo by BRENDAN ASH

Sitting together in the doctor's office in 2019, Brooke and Trent LeFors were thrilled to learn they were having a baby boy.

That happiness soon turned to fear.

Moments after the couple's 19-week ultrasound scan, the doctor said it appeared their baby — Liam — would be born with a cleft lip and palate. "I was so scared," says Mrs. LeFors. "I couldn't tell you what we even talked about that day. I was so nervous about what was to come."

Cleft lip and cleft palate are birth defects that occur when a baby's lip or mouth do not form properly during pregnancy. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in 1,600 babies are born with the defects, which can cause problems with feeding, speaking and hearing.

"Having your first baby is scary, but having your first baby with something wrong where they will need surgery is even scarier," Mrs. LeFors says. "I definitely relied on my faith and just put it in God's hands and trusted that He would give my husband and me the strength we needed."

As they moved closer to the delivery date, they were referred to William Dougherty, MD, Assistant Professor of EVMS Otolaryngology, who is a member of the Craniofacial Center at Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters.

They discussed what the repair would be and how they would approach it. "When I met with Dr. Dougherty I relaxed a bit," Mrs. LeFors says. "He told us exactly what to expect for Liam, and he gave us the confidence we needed."

The first few weeks after Liam was born were hard, but they felt prepared.

"Before the first surgery on his cleft lip, he was having trouble keeping milk down," she says, "but the team let us know that might happen and gave us the tools and strategies to make sure he was able to eat."

Today, 1-year-old Liam is a happy and energetic little boy who loves to eat. He had his second surgery to repair his cleft palate in June with great results.

"There are no words to express the comfort Dr. Dougherty and the entire Craniofacial Center brought us," Mrs. LeFors says. "We felt like we had a team backing us up. We think of them like family." □



Before and After: Liam first visited Dr. Mark Dougherty when he was three months old for a cleft lip repair. The photo on the left was taken just before his cleft palate surgery in June 2021. Photo courtesy of Dr. Mark Dougherty.



Watch the LeFors' story at
evms.edu/BabyLiam.

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Alfred Abuhamad, MD, is named Interim President, Provost and Dean of the School of Medicine

