



**Story  
Summary**

**Diversity is the richness of human differences and similarities.** Jefferson believes that cultivating a diverse, inclusive environment improves healthcare and health equity for all patients and communities.

# MANY VOICES,

Programs and initiatives at SKMC, such as cultural competency training, a diversity council and projects to increase the number of doctors from underrepresented minorities, **benefit students' educational experience and the future of medicine.**

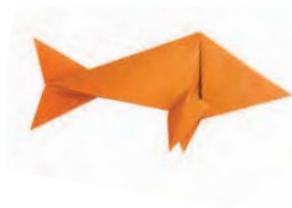
In 2016, a Jefferson program to prepare minority students for the medical school application process is expected to **double in size from its first year.** Likewise, a pilot four-year program training SKMC students as medical Spanish interpreters will enroll its second class and expand students' real-world experiences at a clinic for Spanish-speaking patients.

# BETTER CARE

## SKMC Diversity Programs Enrich Medical Education and Community

BY ROBIN WARSHAW

Christopher Rivera-Pintado leads an MCAT prep group.  
*Photo by Carlos Holmes.*



The words "gout" and "eye drops" are unlikely to be confused in a doctor-patient conversation conducted in English. But when the patient speaks Spanish and the doctor knows only a little of the language, then "gota" (gout) can be mistaken as the problem when a patient mentions "gotas" (as in "gotas para los ojos," or eye drops), says Joseph Villavicencio, a second-year Sidney Kimmel Medical College student.

Villavicencio is explaining the risks of similar-sounding words to students enrolled in the Longitudinal Medical Spanish Translator Program, one of SKMC's medical education, clinical practice and research initiatives to create a diverse and inclusive environment and provide the best care to all people. The pilot course is training 18 first-year students to become certified medical Spanish interpreters. As part of the program, the students will volunteer at a South Philadelphia clinic that has many Latino patients and, in their fourth year, gain clinical experience in a Spanish-speaking country.

Training students as both doctors and medical interpreters fits with SKMC's commitment to expand diversity through awareness and sensitivity to differences—ethnic, racial, religious, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic,



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—KAREN NOVIELLI, MD '87

disability and more—and to foster an institutional culture that includes everyone.

“We take this seriously,” says Bernard L. Lopez, MD '86, associate dean for diversity and community engagement. “This is about incorporating diversity and inclusion as part of our daily work.”

### Creating a Community for All

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives (ODII) at SKMC, which Lopez directs, works to promote diversity, enhance cultural competency or knowledge about other backgrounds and ensure health equity. ODII efforts involve students, residents, faculty, staff and institutional leaders in a variety of initiatives. The goal, Lopez says, is to “make this a place that provides the best and most culturally competent patient care.”

SKMC pipeline programs seek to increase physicians from underrepresented minority (URM) groups, those with fewer doctors than proportional to their U.S. population numbers. In the Future Docs program, high-school students participate in a nine-week winter program on health professions, with a middle-school project planned. A summer program prepares college students for applying to medical school. SKMC is also part of a program to create more URM physicians for the state of Delaware.

At least a dozen SKMC student groups represent varied populations, providing support for common concerns, education for the Jefferson community and greater understanding for all patients. Among the groups: the Student National Medical Association, for African American students; Jefferson Latino Medical Students Association; Asian Pacific Medical Student Association; Jeff LGBTQ for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer students; and the Jefferson Muslim Student Association. The groups conduct workshops, networking, social events and service projects.

The SKMC Council for Diversity and Inclusion, headed by SKMC Dean Mark L. Tykocinski, MD, creates diversity initiatives, policies and programs with input from members who are deans, department chairs, faculty, administrators, residents and students. “Anytime you have a diverse group



In December, students Adesola Oje and John Honhart co-hosted a “Holidays Around the World” event celebrating diverse cultures on campus. Photo by Roger Barone.



of individuals coming together to solve a problem, the outcome is better than if people are similar," says Council member Karen Novielli, MD '87, associate provost for faculty affairs and vice dean for faculty affairs and professional development.

The Council recently began work on a catalog of Jefferson's health disparities research, care initiatives and community service programs. The catalog will augment collaborations and be a resource for Jefferson's planned Center for Health Equity. That Center will launch this year, says Joseph B. Hill, senior vice president and chief diversity officer.

The SKMC Council also fostered a module on cultural competency in Jefferson's Health Stream Training Program. The module used caring for a transgender patient to highlight the importance of providing care informed by inclusive understanding and provided education to all faculty and staff at Jefferson.

Women now comprise half of students enrolled at SKMC, but there are still gender gaps in certain specialties, faculty and departmental roles. According to Novielli, SKMC needs to include more URM and LGBTQ physicians as faculty, bring women into specialties where their numbers are low and increase diversity in departmental and senior leadership. While SKMC has made progress in these areas, there is still work to

Classical Indian dance comes in many forms. At a multicultural holiday celebration, SKMC students performed a fusion piece encompassing Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi and Kathak influences. *Photo by Roger Barone.*

be done. "Our faculty should look like the students and patients we serve," she says.

"Diversity is not just tolerance," says Novielli. "It's a matter of making sure that everyone feels completely part of the community and able to contribute maximally."

### Encouraging a Dream

As a boy growing up in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, Christopher Rivera-Pintado dreamed of becoming a professional baseball player. Then his brother and father were seriously burned in an accident and hospitalized for a month. "Ever since then, I developed a passion for the medical field," he says.

Rivera-Pintado came to the mainland five years ago, speaking no English, yet finished high school and entered Delaware State University. He played baseball at college for two years, then set that aside to pursue his newer dream of becoming a doctor.

He was among 12 participants in the first Jefferson Summer Training and Enrichment Program for Underrepresented Persons in medicine (JeffSTEP-UP). The eight-week program prepares minority students for their application to medical school. In addition to Delaware State, students in the 2015 program came from Rutgers University-Camden, West Chester University, St. Joseph's University and Southern Methodist University.



# Giving to Enhance Diversity

Minority doctors comprise about 6 percent of the total U.S. physician population, a number that has not changed since the 1960s, says Traci R. Trice, MD, assistant dean for diversity and student diversity programs. “If you look more specifically at certain populations, particularly black males, the numbers have even gone down,” she notes. Yet African Americans comprise about 15 percent of the general U.S. population and Hispanics or Latinos make up about 17 percent.

Several barriers exist to improving those statistics. “Part of it is knowledge, part is financial and part is not having mentors in those communities,” says Trice.

JeffSTEP-UP students attend workshops on clinical skills, the application process and interviewing. They receive 135 hours of MCAT preparation through the Princeton Review and do clinical shadowing with Jefferson faculty in family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, emergency medicine and general surgery.

“I loved that experience shadowing in surgery,” says Rivera-Pintado. He is considering a future as an orthopaedic surgeon, sports medicine doctor or plastic surgeon, so he can work with burn patients. “It increased my desire to go to medical school.” After finishing the program, he took the MCATs and was accepted at Cooper Medical School of Rowan University.

According to Trice, JeffSTEP-UP will become a residential program this summer and have more participants. Results for the first year’s class will also be assessed.

“We want to see them be successful,” she says. “Even if they enroll somewhere besides SKMC, we can say that we’ve made an impact in their lives and also in diversifying the physician workforce.”



**Thirty-six years ago, James and Nancy Baxter established close ties to Jefferson during one of the scariest times of their lives. Their newborn son, Andy, was a patient in Jefferson’s intensive care nursery. Andy not only survived—he thrived and has gone on to live a happy, healthy life.**

The Baxters have remained a part of the Jefferson community since Andy’s birth, even establishing a neonatology fellowship in the name of Andy’s physician. Recently, they developed a passion for scholarships and made a new pledge to support minority students attending—and aspiring to attend—Sidney Kimmel Medical College. The Baxter Family Scholarships will provide full tuition to eight medical students from underrepresented groups (four each in the classes of 2020 and 2021), and additional funds will benefit two student pipeline programs: the Summer Training and Enrichment Program for Underrepresented Persons in Medicine (STEP-UP) and the Saturday Academy, a brand-new program through which minority middle-school students participate in educational activities one Saturday per month for nine months.

Through their generosity, James and Nancy Baxter have become integral partners in Jefferson’s journey to reimagine diversity and inclusion in health and education.

## Improving Care

The impetus behind the medical interpreter program was simple. “If you don’t know the language (of the patient), you make errors, you misdiagnose and you hurt a vulnerable population,” says second-year SKMC student Daniel Sentana Lledo, who developed the course with Villavicencio.

Adults may be uncomfortable translating medical terms to a relative, or want to keep sensitive medical information private. Using an untrained person to translate creates difficulties for doctors, too. “You lose empathy and communication skills with your patient when you have to rely on someone else,” says Sentana Lledo. “And that definitely impacts patient care.”

About half of the program’s students are Hispanic or Latino. They complete online curriculum modules and meet every three weeks to discuss medical Spanish content and practice speaking with each other. Volunteering at the Puentes de Salud clinic, which serves an immigrant population, is required. There, students take patients’ vital signs, shadow physicians and interpret.

Students receive humanities credit for the program, but their interest “comes from their passion,” Sentana Lledo says.

**“The more confident you are when you speak, the more it makes your patient feel better.”**

—JOSEPH VILLAVICENCIO,  
SKMC STUDENT

Gabriel Cambroner, a first-year SKMC student, is Costa Rican. “I want to work with an urban community,” he says. He joined the interpreter program because the clinic work gives him more interactions with patients. Practicing medical Spanish with him, Shalini Vadalia is interested in cultural differences related to health. She also is a first-year student, is ethnically Indian and minored in Spanish in college. “You can only give to your patients if you understand their language and understand their culture,” she says.

As the students rise to leave the session, Villavicencio reminds them to email him if they want to mentor at Esperanza Academy Charter High School in Philadelphia’s Hunting Park neighborhood—a school where most students are Spanish-speaking.

“It’s a good opportunity for community service and to practice Spanish,” he says. “The more confident you are when you speak, the more it makes your patient feel better.” 🗣️



Joseph Villavicencio teaches SKMC students in the Longitudinal Medical Spanish Translator Program. Photo by David Lunt.

