

Rush University College of Health Sciences

Impact

Equity, Global Health, and COVID Response Edition

Expanding the boundaries of research, teaching and patient care



COVID-19 puts national spotlight on respiratory care

16

4 BSHS student volunteers combat COVID in the community

10 Career-changer finds purpose on medical mission trips

24 OT students and faculty take action against inequity

Impact Contents

What an impact we can make

Our values of collaboration and care are showcased throughout the Rush University College of Health Sciences (CHS) — in our classrooms, clinics, and the communities we serve.

During the past 18 months, the need for caring, collaborative allied health professionals has become even greater. At CHS, our graduates are agile, active clinicians who excel in their fields and can confidently face whatever challenges lie ahead. That is because our health sciences programs prepare students to succeed not only as practitioners but also as leaders.

Read on to learn how our CHS students and faculty are advancing care during the COVID-19 pandemic and promoting more equitable access for patients, throughout the country and across the world.

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About the cover: From left to right: Paulina Trejo, J. Brady Scott, PhD, Stephani Flores. Respiratory Care Program Associate Professor and two students in full COVID-19 PPE.

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Message from the Dean

Making an impact when it's needed most



At the College of Health Sciences, our academic programs are rigorous for a reason. Today's complex health care challenges require interprofessional solutions, and we expect our faculty, students and alumni to not only collaborate to find answers but also to lead the way.

Right now, we need this kind of leadership from allied health professionals at the local, national and global levels. The people we care for here in Chicago, across the country and around the world continue to suffer from the layered effects of the pandemic, health disparities and social injustice. Here at Rush, we strive to provide future allied health professionals with the experience and skills they need to confidently take on these challenges for the greater good. Our students don't just learn about these problems in an abstract way — they witness the real-life implications every day and pivot to find meaningful solutions.

Take the COVID-19 pandemic, for example. In the early days of the outbreak, many faculty and students were essential members of our care teams, finding new ways

to innovate in their clinical roles. At the same time, they faced new challenges in their academic roles and had to quickly adapt to new teaching and mentoring models. This agility in the midst of uncertainty should be commended. I am so proud of the continuing commitment of our faculty, students and staff, who have taken on the countless challenges of recent months with professionalism and grace.

Agility, professionalism and grace are just some of the qualities of CHS faculty and students highlighted throughout this issue of *Impact*. In these pages, we feature some of the ground-breaking work that our students and faculty have taken on during this past year to respond to the pandemic and calls for greater health equity at the national and global levels. I am so inspired by their commitment to make an impact, and I hope you will find similar inspiration to guide your own personal and professional journeys.

Charlotte Royeen, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, FASAHP, FNAP
Dean, College of Health Sciences

College of Health Sciences is committed to student scholarships

During the past four years, the College of Health Sciences has awarded more than \$8 million in scholarships across all programs. More than \$3.8 million of the scholarships have been awarded to self-identified underrepresented minority students (URM). This includes African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native students.

“The College of Health Sciences is able to annually commit to life-changing scholarships,” says Natalie Landfair Cassidy, director of financial operations. “In my role, I have been able to observe first-hand the college and university's strong commitment to student success through supporting unique, student-oriented awarding strategies. The university's commitment to scholarships has enabled the college and programs to further enhance our diversity initiatives.”



\$8 million

in scholarships across all programs



24%

students self-identify as URM



\$3.8 million

awarded to URM students

BSHS student volunteers combat COVID in the community

Volunteering is integral to the Rush student experience. It helps aspiring health care professionals see the inequities that contribute to poor health outcomes—and helps them understand the impact that they can have on the communities they serve.

BSHS Student Patrick Blake and other students helped educate local residents about COVID.



This past year, several students in the bachelor's of health sciences program gained such insights through their volunteer work with the Northwest Side Housing Center. Alongside community leaders and Rush faculty the students helped educate under-resourced residents in the Belmont Cragin community about COVID-19 prevention.

Patrick Blake, a second-year BSHS student and former paramedic, says gaining a deeper sense of the health inequities through his volunteer work will help him whether he pursues emergency medicine, sports medicine or aerospace medicine in medical school after graduating from the BSHS program this spring. "I have to be the best advocate that I can for my patients when I become a physician," Blake says.

Spreading knowledge where it's needed most

Through the Rush Community Service Initiatives Program, Blake volunteered with his first-year student peer mentees, Joel Tinajero and Diana Weldegiorgis. Together, they distributed hand sanitizer, masks and COVID prevention information in English and Spanish to residents and businesses in the Belmont Cragin area. At one point, about one in four residents in the area tested positive for COVID.

Volunteering has provided Tinajero, who plans to attend medical school after he graduates in 2022, with insights that he couldn't gain from a book. "It's given more meaning to my career goals and my educational path," says Tinajero, who grew up in Round Lake Beach, Ill.

For Weldegiorgis, who grew up in Eritrea in eastern Africa, being a bridge between health care workers and community residents has helped her see firsthand how lack of resources can affect communities. "If you don't have food, you're not going to think about masks," she says. After Weldegiorgis graduates in 2022, she plans to attend medical school or a physician assistant studies program.

“ [Volunteering] has given more meaning to my career goals and my educational path.”

— Joel Tinajero, first-year BSHS student



During the outreach, Blake believes he and his fellow students had a positive, “domino effect” on residents. He recalls talking with a man delivering groceries to his sick mother about the importance of wearing a mask during the visit. Weldegiorgis remembers providing one Spanish-speaking man with a mask and Spanish-language COVID information. Later on, the man came back for an additional mask for his wife. Meanwhile, Tinajero, who speaks fluent Spanish, helped break down communication barriers between health care workers and residents.

Sharing knowledge for success

Blake says being a mentor to Tinajero and Weldegiorgis during the pandemic has been challenging, but they frequently text each other and manage to meet every two weeks for Zoom calls. “As much as I hope I’ve taught them, I’ve learned a lot from them as well,” Blake says.

Tinajero says having Blake as a mentor has helped him put his best foot forward in the BSHS program. “It’s been a great experience to learn from someone who’s already been through those steps, who already had those struggles and knows how to overcome them,” he says. Tinajero also encourages students from underrepresented minority groups in health care to consider applying to the program, even if it seems out of reach. “If you struggle with your grades, you’re going to get help. If you’re struggling with your finances, you’re going to get help,” he says. “So, don’t doubt yourself and take a leap of faith.”

Doctoral student explores how discrimination shapes PT patients' experiences

“Rush has an excellent reputation, and sometimes students are intimidated by that. So, when they see me, they see themselves.”

— DeMar English, BSHS alum and recruiter

DeMar English (left) graduated from Rush in 2019 and is now a recruiter.

Alum makes high URM enrollment his mission

DeMar English walked away from a 15-year career in the supply chain at a major food and beverage company to pursue a career in health care. “I knew that what I was doing wasn’t satisfying my soul,” English says. “I knew that I needed to be at Rush.”

English says earning a bachelor’s in health sciences was one of the most difficult yet rewarding challenges of his life. Yet he found the support he needed from two faculty members: Mary Jo Guglielmo, MPH, assistant dean and program director, and Dina Batlivala, MS, director of marketing and admissions and faculty in the BSHS program. “Those two ladies took me underneath their wings and supported and nurtured me through this program,” he says.

After he graduated in 2019, English was hired as an admissions specialist/recruiter for the BSHS program. In this role, he educates prospective students at City Colleges and other community colleges and helps them navigate the application process while providing insight about his experience. “One of the goals of the program is that we want our students to look like the patient population that we serve,” he says. “Rush has an excellent reputation, and sometimes students are intimidated by

that. So, when they see me, they see themselves... And it’s important for students to see people who look like them when they pursue higher education.”

In the BSHS program, the proportion of enrollees who identify as underrepresented minorities (URM) has increased in just a few years. Among the program’s fall 2020 cohort, 95 percent self-identified as URM. Of the 21 students, 12 identify as Hispanic, and eight identify as Black. More than half of the students are from City Colleges. The students also represent a wide range of ages, from 20 years to 51 years. Guglielmo credits Rush’s diversity and inclusion efforts, as well as English’s recruitment skills, for the program’s successful enrollment of URMs.

When new BSHS students come to Rush, English encourages them to immerse themselves in the experience. “I tell them to take advantage of all of the support, the programs, the workshops, the lunch-and-learns and the opportunities that come their way,” he says.

English hasn’t stopped his own commitment to education. He will earn his MBA from National Louis University at the end of 2021 and plans to apply to the occupational therapy doctorate program at Rush, with the goal of owning his own OT practice.

95% of BSHS students self-identify as URM



In her final year studying physical therapy at another school, Jerenda Bond, PT, DPT, experienced an act of discrimination that left a deep mark.

As part of a competitive game during class, the professor split the students into two groups: “The White Guys” comprising white students and “The Janitors” comprising students of color. After Bond and other students of color complained, the professor was ultimately dismissed. Years later, this incident drove the Rush PhD candidate to investigate the impact of everyday discriminatory acts on patients of color receiving physical therapy, for her dissertation.

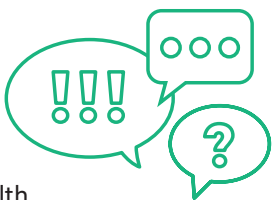
Specifically, Bond is studying microaggressions, defined as discriminatory acts committed toward others because of their religious or sexual orientation, race, gender, socioeconomic status, disability or other marginalized status. “The goal at the end of the day is to help train health care professionals to critically consider their own lens and their own biases,” Bond says. “This can translate to the health care professionals being able to understand

“The goal at the end of the day is to help train health care professionals to critically consider their own lens and their own biases.”

— Jerenda Bond, PT, DPT, PhD candidate

patients’ perspectives when these microaggressive experiences occur.”

Emerging research shows that microaggressions can contribute to negative health outcomes and potentially exacerbate existing health inequities, says Monique Reed, PhD, RN, associate professor and assistant dean at the Rush University College of Nursing and research mentor for Bond’s study. “This project is one piece of a continuum of knowledge that we need to explore and develop to understand the unequal treatment and disparate health outcomes that are suffered by Black and Latino communities and other marginalized populations,” Reed says. “We need to look at what we have done collectively as a science community to contribute to these disparate outcomes.”



Using Zoom to zero in on healthier nutrition choices

For years, Rush faculty and students have teamed up with local churches and community organizations on solutions to address health disparities on Chicago's West Side. During the pandemic, many of these initiatives moved online.

One such initiative took the form of a virtual barbershop and beauty salon for barbers and beauticians on the West Side. Joined by a Rush dermatologist and medical students, nutrition students offered an online presentation on good nutrition to optimize hair, skin and nails. Another set of students showed high school athletes and church members on the West Side how to make turkey chili and other healthy game day snacks.

Rush faculty and students also have developed a series of healthy cooking videos on YouTube and created podcasts to assist local residents with healthy shopping strategies.

All of these initiatives are designed to make health information more accessible to West Side residents. "Sometimes you have to meet people where they are

instead of the other way around," says Christy Tangney, PhD, FACN, CNS, professor in the Departments of Clinical Nutrition and Preventive Medicine. "One of the good things that has come out of the pandemic is that it has made us realize there are other ways to deliver this information."

One of the most recent examples was on Martin Luther King Day, when Rush clinical nutrition students presented online cooking demonstrations for various churches on the West and South Sides in collaboration with medical students and others from the Student Diversity & Community Engagement office under the direction of Sharon Gates, DSW. "Students just loved that interaction," Tangney says. "They got as much out of it as the church members and community members did. It was a win-win for all of us."



AuD students gain global health knowledge through partnership

An innovative partnership between Rush and the Ida Institute in Denmark helps doctoral students gain insights into global health and patient-centered care (PCC).

Rush's affiliation with the Ida Institute gives students an avenue to engage in global health research and share their findings on a broad scale, says Patricia McCarthy, PhD, professor emerita, pictured below. For more than a decade, McCarthy has served on the faculty at the Ida Institute. Megan Worthington, AuD, has joined this partnership to support the Ida Institute's pediatric initiatives.

For a recent project, two Rush AuD students investigated attitudes toward a PCC approach, which engages patients

and family members in decision-making. Results showed a global trend toward a preference for PCC among audiology students on five continents. "Incorporating a patient-centered care approach helps ensure that decisions are culturally appropriate and guided by family values and needs in addition to evidence-based diagnosis and treatment recommendations," McCarthy says.

Beyond advancing global health, the top-ranked audiology program at Rush continues to integrate cultural competence into its curriculum and clinical education, which is based on the teacher-practitioner model. Cultural competency is requisite to effective patient-centered hearing care. In combination, the PCC approach ultimately can lead to improved outcomes for patients and their families, McCarthy says.



Career-changer finds purpose on medical mission trips



Many people are inspired by family members to pursue health care careers. For cardiovascular perfusion student Audrey Barba, one such inspiration is her Lolo Tony (“lolo” is the Tagalog word for grandfather).

Lolo Tony is a retired obstetrician/gynecologist who was born in the Philippines and practiced for decades in Wichita, Kan. Her late grandmother was also a physician who was born in the Philippines.

Barba had worked for years as a cardiovascular operating room nurse in Kansas but wanted a new challenge, so she chose to pursue a master’s degree in cardiovascular perfusion. As a single mom to her son, Jayden, Barba realized that going back to graduate school meant significant life changes. But as a cardiovascular perfusion student, she knew she had made the right choice when she volunteered for a medical mission trip to Cebu City in the Philippines in December 2019. “The mission trip combined some of my biggest loves: my family ties, my culture and philanthropic work,” she says.

Working as part of a multidisciplinary team, Barba assisted with eight cardiac surgeries, most on children with congenital heart defects. Rather than finding the 20-hour workdays draining, Barba says the mission trip revitalized her. “It really just made my heart happy,” she says.

Ten months after her trip to the Philippines, Barba completed a medical mission to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, where she assisted with 11 surgeries in five days.



After graduation, Barba hopes to apply her skills as a pediatric perfusionist on other medical missions. She described these aspirations in an essay, which earned her the prestigious Segal scholarship from Rush University. “Working as a nurse has been a fulfillment of my childhood dream to work in the medical field, but now I am ready to channel my passion to the next step, and for me, that is cardiovascular perfusion,” she wrote.

As she considers post-graduation job offers, Barba still turns to Lolo Tony for advice and encouragement. “He’s always telling me how proud of me he is,” she says. “Just knowing that he’s supportive and loving makes a difference.”



Audrey Barba and her Lolo Tony

“The mission trip combined some of my biggest loves: my family ties, my culture and philanthropic work.”

– Audrey Barba, cardiovascular perfusion student

Sharing transfusion expertise to improve health equity in Africa



Barba's surgical colleagues in Santo Domingo.

Barba (second from right) enjoyed collaborating with other volunteers and staff in the Dominican Republic.



Barba with a 4-year-old patient in Cebu City.



Barba in surgery in Santo Domingo.

Teaching children about careers in cardiovascular perfusion



Last fall, 100 fourth and fifth graders from West Side schools learned what it means to be a cardiovascular perfusionist as part of Rush's Mini Medical School. Each year, Rush student leaders organize the program to help elementary school students discover a wide range of health care careers. Unlike previous years, this Mini-Med School was entirely virtual, with six virtual learning sessions.

Rush cardiovascular perfusion student Alexander Leonor enjoyed helping faculty member Jim Murray, BS, CCP, LP, create a short video to teach young people about his chosen field. "There's always a little extra pressure to perform when there's a camera," says Leonor, "but it was a nice break to take time and help teach others about what a perfusionist does."



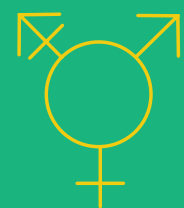
People in sub-Saharan Africa experience a wide spectrum of conditions, from sickle cell disease and cancer to trauma, that could benefit from expertise in transfusion medicine. That is why Rush has formed a unique partnership with the University of Global Health Equity in Kigali, Rwanda to help provide this urgently needed knowledge.

As part of the pilot project, Rush will help establish a Center for Red Cell Transfusion Excellence at the African university and offer scholarships for up to four laboratory professionals in Rwanda to join Rush's online specialist in blood bank technology certificate program.

The graduates of the program will use a "train the trainer" model to share their education and training with other providers across Africa. "By sharing our knowledge and subject matter experts, we're able to give our African colleagues the tools to address some of their challenges," says Laurie Gillard, MS, MT(ASCP)CM, SBBCM, program director for the specialist in blood bank technology certificate at Rush. "There's no equity when you can't even get a safe transfusion for your child or if you are a woman who dies from a postpartum hemorrhage because there isn't available blood."



Lab project aims to advance more equitable care for transgender patients



Approximately

1.4
million

Americans identify as transgender, according to the Williams Institute.

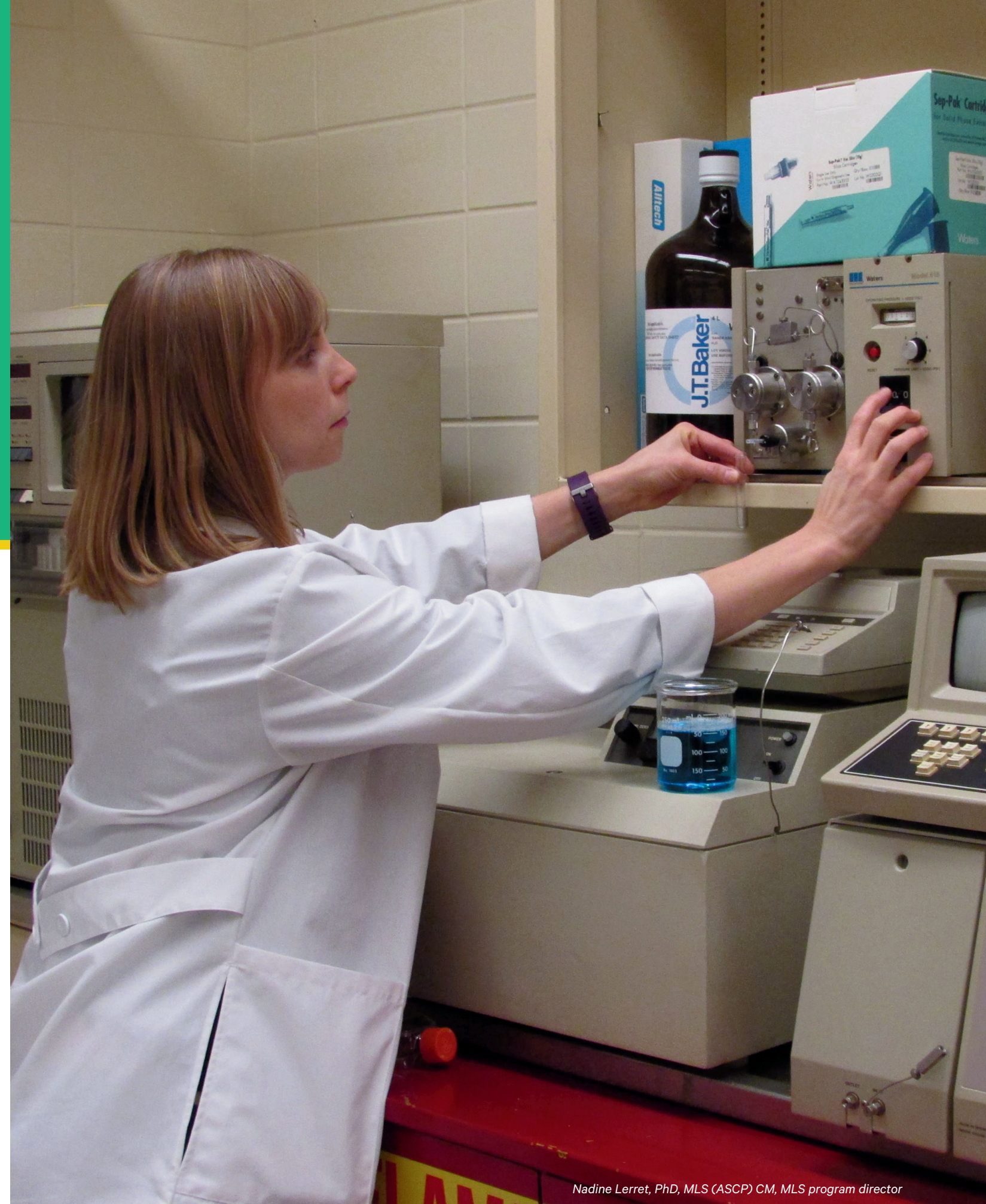
Many of these individuals take hormone therapy, which can affect some routine lab tests. For example, hormones can affect creatinine values, which are used to measure kidney function. Using a male or female reference range for a transgender individual could lead to an inaccurate interpretation of that patient's kidney function.

One doctoral candidate at Rush, Melissa Tucker, hopes to address this problem. Tucker plans to identify the analytes most in need of reference ranges specific for the transgender population.

Having reference ranges for the transgender population could help ensure that these patients receive the best standard of care, says Nadine Lerret, PhD, MLS (ASCP) CM, MLS program director. "Transgender individuals

have been left out for the longest time," she says. "There needs to be concrete evidence, and then reference ranges based off of that evidence, for them, just like there are for the cisgender population."

Tucker and Lerret aim to collaborate with specialists in transgender care at Affirm: The Rush Center for Gender, Sexuality and Reproductive Health and TransFORWARD in Texas to identify reference ranges for pediatric, adult and geriatric patients. Lerret says her MLS students are eager to assist in collecting samples from Rush patients and validating the reference ranges as part of their research. She also hopes to engage Rush alumni at other institutions to submit samples to validate appropriate reference ranges.



Nadine Lerret, PhD, MLS (ASCP) CM, MLS program director



COVID-19 puts national spotlight on respiratory care

Artwork by Piper Scott

At one point in the spring of 2020, Rush respiratory therapists cared for as many as one-quarter of all ventilated COVID-19 patients in Illinois.

And while COVID-19 patient volumes have fluctuated since the pandemic began, Rush respiratory therapists like J. Brady Scott are still caring for the sickest of the sick, sometimes in those patients' final hours, day after day.

"It's tough to see people in rooms by themselves and see your colleagues with marks under their eyes who are tired, who've got to go back and do it again," Scott says.

At times, the challenges tested Scott's own resilience. Fortunately, his wife, Kristin, and their five-year-old daughter, Piper, were eager to lend their support. When he came home with bruises around his eyes from a long day in personal protective equipment (PPE), Scott got the break he needed by painting or doing crafts with Kristin and Piper. One day at the height of the spring surge, they pampered him with a "spa girls' day," complete with a foot scrub in Piper's child-sized footbath. "The water was a little hot for me and my feet were a little cramped, but they took good care of me," Scott says.

Shining a light on RTs

While Scott recognizes the enormous toll that COVID-19 has taken on his patients and colleagues, Scott is grateful that the pandemic has helped the public gain a better understanding of the vital role that RTs play in health care. "Frankly, I'm glad that respiratory therapists are getting the attention they're getting," he says. "They're working really hard. They have faced down the unknown, and they have been brave." Scott's own efforts have helped drive that greater public awareness: he has appeared on national and local television news shows, and he wrote an op-ed piece published in *U.S. News & World Report*.

Scott, who is director of clinical education in the master's degree program in respiratory care, came to Rush from North Carolina because he wanted to advance the profession of respiratory care by helping to build a graduate-level, research-oriented respiratory care program. With this heightened focus on respiratory care, Scott believes additional promising candidates will likely pursue the field.

Praise for Rush RT students

After 20 years as a RT, Scott says working through the pandemic has been motivating for him as a teacher-practitioner, which is Rush's educational model. "It's energized me as an educator to see that our students are so willing to do their very best to take care of patients in their community," says Scott, who recently received his PhD from Rush. "Sometimes, you need a reminder of why you're working so hard."

Through all of the pandemic-related uncertainty, Scott says his RT students haven't complained. "They just walked right into their clinical rotations knowing that this is the job of the respiratory therapist and accepted that this is how it's going to be," he says. "It's inspiring to know that these are the people who are going to be at the bedside if we need care."

Learning to be an RT during a pandemic has also helped students see their value. "When they're standing in a room making complex decisions and doing complex care, it validates all of the homework they've had. It validates all of the stress that we put them under," Scott says. "It also validates to me what we're doing, how hard we push our students and the really high expectations that we have of our students."

RT program earns two APEX awards

During the pandemic, respiratory therapists at Rush were not just on the front line. They also published research on new ways of treating COVID-19 patients, including proning (positioning patients facedown to reduce the need for ventilation).

Such innovations, combined with the respiratory care team's overall commitment to high-quality care, earned Rush dual APEX Recognition Awards in the acute care hospital and educational program categories from the American Academy for Respiratory Care.

Rush is the only institution in the nation to receive recognition in two categories of the APEX Recognition Award.



“I’m glad that respiratory therapists are getting the attention they’re getting... They have faced down the unknown, and they have been brave.”

– Respiratory therapist J. Brady Scott, PhD, MSc, RRT, RRT-ACCS, AE-C, FAARC, FCCP



Doing homework during COVID



#RTstrong driveway art



RT faculty and students during training 2020



Spa girls

Research explores how social determinants of health affect COVID-19 outcomes

As an undergrad at Indiana University, Alayna Meyers knew that she wanted to go to grad school for health systems management and chose Rush for its Top 5 ranking by *U.S. News & World Report* and reputation.

“The more research I did, the more opportunities seemed to come with a degree from Rush,” she says. Now a graduate student at Rush, Meyers has the opportunity to work with faculty on grant-supported research examining the connection between social determinants of health and COVID-19 outcomes.

Tricia Johnson, PhD, professor in the Department of Health Systems Management, and Elizabeth Lynch, PhD, associate professor and director of the Section of Community Health in the Department of Preventive Medicine and Rush’s Center for Community Health Equity, are leading this research, which is funded by a \$25,000 grant from the Rush Coronavirus Research Fund. The investigators are examining different facets of COVID-19 patient data from across the Rush system. Johnson and Lynch are currently analyzing COVID-19 severity and outcomes from patients seen in the Rush emergency departments to determine if social determinants had an impact.

Johnson and Lynch aim to create an infrastructure for other Rush researchers interested in health equity and COVID-19 outcomes. “This internal grant has created the opportunity

“This grant should make us more efficient in our research and the questions we’re trying to answer.”

– Tricia Johnson, PhD, professor, Department of Health Systems Management

to collaborate with clinicians across the organization, including those in the emergency department, internal medicine, critical care, neurology and others, to create a master data set that researchers can draw upon,” Johnson says. “This grant should make us more efficient in our research and the questions we’re trying to answer.”

Johnson, along with Scott Hasler, MD, and Manya Gupta, MD, both hospitalists in the Department of Internal Medicine at Rush, are also mentoring Meyers for her master’s project, which is focused on the impact of neighborhood-based social determinants of health on the cost of treating patients with COVID-19. Meanwhile, Lynch is drafting a new paper on racial/ethnic differences and presentation severity for COVID patients who come to the emergency department. “The reason we want to do this is so we can develop interventions to address these social determinants of health — that is the ultimate goal,” Lynch says.

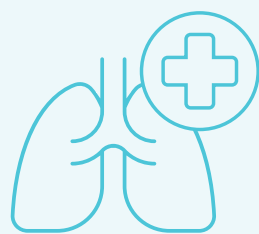
Students assist RTs during COVID-19

During their second year in the master’s of respiratory care program at Rush, students Paulina Trejo and Stephani Flores gained hands-on experience with COVID-19 patients.

Trejo remembers her first day caring for a patient with COVID-19. “It was just amazing to see how sick these patients really were,” she says. “It’s something you can’t learn from a textbook because it’s new.” She and Flores were hired as respiratory therapist assistants and helped the RTs by taking some tasks off of their plates, such as gathering supplies and keeping tabs on patients while under close supervision by faculty.

Trejo, who grew up in Palatine, Ill., valued the experience of working collaboratively with RTs, physicians and nurses

to care for patients. “We’re very evidence-based, so that helps build this trust and helps everybody work better as a team,” she says.



Flores, who is also from the Chicago suburbs, is grateful for the support she received from faculty during this stressful time. “This year has shown me how important our job is, and I’m really proud to have chosen this field,” she says. “I’ve never been involved in a program where I know how much they care about us and our success, and they want us to be the very best that we can be. They work with us so much, and they truly do everything possible to make sure that we’re comfortable and that we’re ready to be at the bedside.”



From left to right: Alayna Meyers, Tricia Johnson, PhD, and Elizabeth Lynch, PhD.

New department highlights value of social work at Rush



Leaders at Rush University have established the Department of Social Work within the College of Health Sciences to further develop the academic culture of the college and provide an academic home for social workers at Rush. Robyn Golden, LCSW, associate vice president of social work and community health at Rush University Medical Center, will chair the new department.

Given the national spotlight on health equity and social determinants of health, Golden believes the time is right to establish the department at Rush. “So much of what social workers do helps to address disparities and mitigate areas of social risk that can influence overall health and well-being,” she says.

Golden, who is a well-known expert in older adult care and outpatient social work services in health care settings, says the department will help advance Rush’s own mission to promote health equity. “We recognize that social care is as critical as medical care for patients,” she says. She also believes the new department acknowledges the important research conducted by Rush’s social workers, who have earned a national reputation for innovation in the field through the Center for Health and Social Care Integration at Rush.

“So much of what social workers do helps to address disparities and mitigate areas of social risk that can influence overall health and well-being.”

– Robyn Golden, LCSW, associate vice president of social work and community health at Rush University Medical Center

To date, social workers have served as faculty in various interprofessional courses and roles at Rush University. In the future, the new department at Rush will offer specialized certificates, courses and fellowships for already licensed social workers, and hopes to further incorporate social work expertise across disciplines.

Rush chaplains offer comfort during pandemic and social unrest



During the COVID-19 pandemic, pastoral care interns, residents and faculty at Rush have offered their special type of support to anyone who needs it.

“The chaplain’s role is to walk alongside staff as well as patients and families,” says Clayton Thomason, JD, MDiv, chairperson of the Department of Religion, Health and Human Values. “We are not there to try to solve problems, necessarily, but to simply be present and be an empathic, calm presence in the situation.”

Each unit at Rush has a dedicated chaplain, who forms meaningful relationships with nurses, physicians and other providers when they reach out to share their fears and anxieties around the pandemic.

Chaplains also have been on call to help staff struggling with social unrest in recent months. “In the midst of COVID, it was also really important to each member of the department to be responsive to people’s experience of race and racial injustice,” Thomason says.

While offering support to others, these chaplains have faced their own struggles, including the moral distress of

“In the midst of COVID, it was also really important to each member of the department to be responsive to people’s experience of race and racial injustice.”

– Clayton Thomason, JD, MDiv, chairperson of the Department of Religion, Health and Human Values

not being able to provide patient care in person. During the past year, pastoral care interns, residents and faculty alike have had to learn new skills, including how to provide pastoral care and spiritual support remotely.

Interns and residents in the program receive close supervision by faculty and also have group support so they can process their own feelings and fears related to the pandemic and other stressors. “The idea is to work out your own spiritual baggage so you don’t drop it on anybody else’s toes,” Thomason says.

Creating inclusion in imaging sciences and vascular ultrasound

Throughout the years, the Imaging Sciences program has taken its diversity initiatives seriously and has continued to focus on increasing its application and matriculation pool.



“Expanding the diversity of your student population, as a department, must be intentional,” says Laura Vasquez, PhD, RVT (ARDMS), RT (R), (MR), (ARRT), MRSO (MRSCtm). For the admissions cycle of 2019 alone, the total self-identified underrepresented

minority student population equaled more than 81 percent of the new cohort. “Being a chairperson in the College of Health Sciences has enabled us to do so,” Vasquez says.

As the program director for imaging sciences and chairperson for the department of medical imaging sciences, which also includes the vascular ultrasound

program, Vasquez hopes to infuse the spirit of diversity and inclusion within the vascular ultrasound program as well. “In this new information age driven by science, technology and an increasingly competitive global economy, the goal must be to ensure that all students have access to high quality education — with emphasis on the word quality,” Vasquez says.

Vasquez has formerly served as the chair for the CHS Diversity Committee. As of July 2021, the Diversity Committee Chair is Aleen Shah, PA-C and the Vice-Chair is Kenya McGuire Johnson, PT, MA, CHC. “The CHS Diversity Committee proactively serves to promote a culture of inclusion where diversity is much more than simply being fair and showing metrics of progress,” she says, adding that the committee offers recommendations to cultivate a respectful environment that organically values the differences of its community.

“The goal is to offer support for recruitment and retention toward greater diversity and inclusion of the

CHS Diversity Statement

The College of Health Sciences at Rush University supports an environment that values individuals and encourages engagement. Respecting multiple experiences and perspectives will serve to challenge all individuals to learn from each other. By promoting diversity, inclusion and intellectual exchange, we will not only mirror society as it is, but also model society as it should and can be.

Diversity encompasses the range of human differences, including but not limited to race; ethnicity; gender; gender identity; sexual orientation; age; socioeconomic status; physical, cognitive, linguistic or psychosocial abilities; religious or ethical values system; national origin and political beliefs.

Inclusion is involvement and empowerment in which the inherent worth and dignity of all people are recognized. As an inclusive college, we will promote and sustain a sense of belonging, as well as value and respect the talents, beliefs and backgrounds of all individuals.



If we are to accomplish our goals, excellence and equity in education have to go hand-in-hand.”

– Laura Vasquez, PhD, RVT (ARDMS), RT (R), (MR), (ARRT), MRSO (MRSCtm), program director, imaging sciences

health care workforce that thrives at all levels,” Vasquez says. “Then, and only then, can faculty, students and staff reach the level of inclusiveness that mirrors the communities in which we live. The fruit of its labor will foster the recognition of individuality, which gives opportunity for enriching transformation, not just for the community, but also for the society as a whole.”

With the invaluable collaboration and scholarship funding of the Diversity Leadership Council, CHS has succeeded in developing a strategy that supports diversity and inclusion in the college. Vasquez reaffirms, “If we are to accomplish our goals, excellence and equity in education have to go hand-in-hand.”

Current CHS Diversity Leadership:

Aleen Shah, Chair (PA)

Kenya McGuire Johnson, Vice-Chair (BSHS)

Diane Howard (HSM)

Julie Collins (CVP)

LaDonna Moreland (MLS)

DeMar English (CHS)

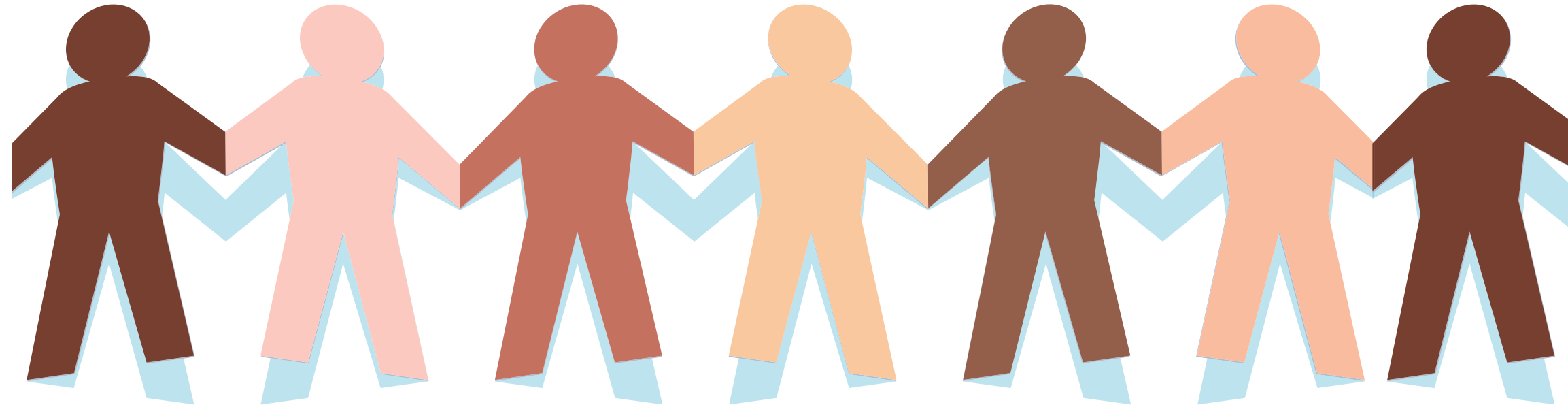
Mary Jo Guglielmo (BSHS)

Sandra Gomez-Perez (CN)

Evguenia Popova (OT)

Bridget Hahn (OT)

OTD students and faculty take action against inequity



Frustrated and inspired to act after George Floyd's death this past summer, Kia Ashley Burks, a third-year occupational therapy (OTD) student, asked her faculty to host a forum to talk about race and OT. Her request was the impetus for Rush Occupational Therapists in Action (ROTA), a group of faculty and students who work together to promote justice and health equity in OT.

Specifically, ROTA is an advising committee to Rush's Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity (COTAD) chapter, which seeks to hold the Rush OTD department accountable for promoting racial and ethnic equity. These equity-promoting strategies include educating future clinicians, faculty and staff; advocating for change within Rush's OTD program; and improving the prospective and current student experience by ensuring an inclusive environment.

"It's a group that will hold faculty accountable for making changes and making sure that health equity and racial issues are addressed in the curriculum," says Linda M. Olson, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, chair and program director of occupational therapy. She believes OT has a special role in advancing these issues. "We're so passionate about it because our graduates are going to see people from all socioeconomic classes and all races," Olson says. "And we want them to be prepared and be aware of cultural differences."

Through ROTA, students and faculty also hope to bring more diversity into the field, as most OTs are white, middle-class women. "Our demographics don't match the population of people that we serve, so it is important that we understand what the daily life experiences are for people who are different from us so that we can meet their needs," says Molly Bathje, PhD, OTR/L, an assistant professor who teaches the sociocultural aspects of care class, one of the most popular in the OTD curriculum.

Bathje, who also leads Rush's COTAD chapter, says both students and faculty in ROTA have shown courage and professionalism discussing sensitive issues. "To make this work, you have to have people on both sides of the conversation who are willing to approach it with some tact," she says.

Sarah Brennan, a second-year OTD student, wants to make sure that what students and faculty discuss during their monthly ROTA meetings gets turned into action.

“

The faculty deserve credit for not only listening to us, but also for being as excited to make the changes that we recommended.”

– Kia Ashley Burks, third-year doctoral, OTD student

At the end of every meeting, she sends out an email with a list of action items. "It holds us accountable as a department to continue moving forward with this, even when the national hype in the media fades away, because this is definitely ongoing," Brennan says.

Faculty have already made changes to the OTD curriculum based on the students' suggestions. For example, implicit bias training is now mandatory for students in their first semester, starting in fall 2021. Several courses also include new case studies, panels, lectures, readings and assignments to promote greater health equity.

"The faculty deserve credit for not only listening to us, but also for being as excited to make the changes that we recommended," Burks says. "My hope for the future is that we never stop talking about this."



From left to right it is Bridget Hahn, OTD, OTR/L, Jordyn Fera, Faith Brown, and Linda Olson, PhD, OTR/L

Students use telehealth to connect with families in under-resourced communities



“

They’re learning how to interact with families that might come from different backgrounds or that might have multiple stressors, especially right now.”

– Anne Hoffmann, PhD, CCC-SLP

OTD students participating in the study include Megan Beiler (right) and Emmalyn Lopez (on the computer screen).



The COVID-19 pandemic has given Rush students like Brittany Piddington and Emmalyn Lopez an opportunity to learn a vital skill: how to support children and families via telehealth.

Funded by an interprofessional grant, the two graduate students deliver early intervention (EI) speech-language pathology and occupational therapy services to families of young children with developmental disabilities.

Prior to the pandemic, under-resourced families on the West Side of Chicago were already facing long waitlists that impeded their access to care. When EI services went virtual because of COVID-19, access became even more difficult secondary to the lack of technological resources in these communities. Thanks to a Rush Translational Science Consortium grant, families can receive a tablet and data plan that allows them to take charge of their child’s care and access the resources they need.

“Early intervention is built on the premise that you teach parents how to help their children’s development, and this telehealth model is one of the purest forms of that because it’s very family-driven,” says Anne Hoffmann, PhD, CCC-SLP, assistant professor in the Department of Communication Disorders and Sciences. And while supporting families, SLP and OTD students learn valuable skills. “The goal is that students gain an appreciation for the importance of working within a family context instead of just with an individual client,” she says.

Hoffmann and Lauren Little, PhD, OTR/L, associate professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy, are co-principal investigators on the interprofessional grant between the SLP and OTD programs, which both rank among the top 20 in the country. Faculty train SLP and OTD students for several weeks before assigning students to their client families. During videoconferencing sessions with parents each week, the SLP and OTD students work in pairs with faculty supervision.

The initiative teaches students how to navigate family dynamics, among other valuable lessons. “They’re learning how to interact with families that might come from different backgrounds or that might have multiple stressors, especially right now,” Hoffmann says.

Piddington, a graduate SLP student, says she has learned a lot about working as part of an interdisciplinary team and from faculty guidance from Little. “It’s been a great collaborative experience to see a skilled OT in action, and see how our professions can work together to make the therapy experience the best it can be,” she says.

Lopez, a graduate OTD student, agrees. “A lot of our sessions involved talking to the caregiver and helping strategize solutions to any challenges they were having with their child,” she says. “I learned so much about providing resources to families in need. Although it may not be part of the typical OT scope, many of these families needed access to specialty providers and resources that they were not receiving otherwise.”

Another aim of the project is a cost analysis to determine how investing in technology could ultimately affect families’ access to services, Little says. But one more subtle benefit of the project could be getting students to shift their perspective and be more collaborative. “This program is helping students get out of the mindset that they are the experts,” Little says. “The family is the expert on their child, we are not.”

For Piddington, the experience of working with families in need of EI services reinforced her desire to work in pediatrics as a speech-language pathologist. “I do love working with the EI population and hope to have them on my future caseload,” she says.

Grainger Fellows embark on community service projects to address health inequities

Physician assistants are often at the front line to promote better access to care and health equity in underserved areas across the United States. Now, two incoming PA students at Rush will earn scholarships as they aim to address health disparities in Chicago, with generous endowed support from The Grainger Foundation.

“The goals of the scholarship are for PA students to assess local healthcare disparity issues and create service initiatives of lasting benefit to the community while learning to be future servant leaders,” says Regina Chen, PhD(c), MS, PA-C, LAc, DiplCH, chairperson of physician assistant studies. “There’s so much to being a meaningful and impactful leader that we try to impart and ingrain in our students. It’s not just medical knowledge and the ability to take good care of patients — that’s a given. It’s also about effective communication and the willingness to serve the larger community. We felt that the Grainger scholarship was the perfect opportunity to meld all of these aspects.”

The central component of the scholarship program is each student’s community service project. The PA program plans to award the first two scholarship recipients during the Summer 2021 term.

The Grainger endowed funds will provide each fellow with \$40,000 toward the cost of enrollment. All incoming PA enrollees are eligible to apply. Applicants should describe their leadership experience and their proposed community service project, to be implemented during their second year at Rush.

“**The goals of the scholarship are for PA students to assess local healthcare disparity issues and create service initiatives of lasting benefit to the community while learning to be future servant leaders.”**

– Regina Chen, PhD(c), chairperson,
Physician Assistant Studies

PA studies program welcomes more URM students

Since 2015, the percentage of underrepresented minority (URM) students in the physician assistant studies program at Rush has grown from 0 percent to 17 percent. By 2022, the program aims to have at least 20 percent of each class reflect URM students.

“We are serious about increasing the diversity profile of our class,” says Regina Chen, PhD(c), PA studies chairperson. Military veterans, people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are the first members of their family to pursue higher education also receive added consideration.

Rush’s highly competitive PA studies program, ranked in the top 50 in the country, aims to create a 360-degree picture of applicants. In April 2020, the program eliminated the GRE as a requirement for admission to reduce implicit bias during recruitment.



The year that was 2020



Commencement



2021 Rush Commencement highlights CHS faculty, student

Two outstanding representatives from the College of Health Sciences — a longtime faculty member and a student passionate about health equity — had the spotlight at Rush University’s 49th Commencement, which took place on May 1, 2021 in a virtual format.

David L. Vines, PhD, MHS, RRT, FAARC, FCCP, associate professor and chairperson of the Department of Cardiopulmonary Sciences and the respiratory care program director, had the honor of serving as University Marshal for the event. Vines’ leadership helped Rush earn dual APEX Recognition Awards in the acute care hospital and educational program categories from the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) this year.

Fritzi Flores, MS-HSM, was selected as student speaker for the Rush University Class of 2021 based on an essay and her achievements while completing her master’s degree in health systems management. Among her many

roles, she served as a project assistant in the Office of Community Health Equity and Engagement.

In her speech, Flores stressed the common bond between graduates from various disciplines, shaped in part by their shared experience of living through the COVID-19 pandemic and a time of social unrest. “Even though we are graduating from different fields, we all have commonalities,” Flores said. “We have never wavered in our commitment to completing our education, and we will never waver in continuing to improve what health care is supposed to be.”



**The Rush College of Health Sciences
is creating tomorrow's leaders in**

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Blood Bank Technology

Cardiovascular Perfusion

Clinical Nutrition

Clinical Laboratory Management

Health Sciences

Health Systems Management

Imaging Sciences

Medical Laboratory Science

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Religion, Health and Human Values

Respiratory Care

Social Work

Speech-Language Pathology

Vascular Ultrasound

