

THE AWIMS ADVISOR

News from the Alliance for Women in Medicine and Science

Dear Colleagues,

Our community recently suffered an enormous tragedy in Chatham, Illinois. Our healthcare teams, from emergency first responders to physicians and staff in the Emergency Department and Department of Pediatrics, worked tirelessly and selflessly to care for seriously injured children. SIU Medicine, St. John's Hospital, and Memorial Health immediately aligned along a shared goal of supporting our community during an incredibly difficult time, providing grief counseling in collaboration with our generous community partner, Chatham Presbyterian Church. Leaders from our faith community offered their spiritual guidance and comfort.



Any loss or suffering in the community impacts each and every one of us. In times of chaos and uncertainty, we band together and hold one another up during the journey of grief and, ultimately, healing. It is during times like this that I am grateful for our caring and courageous community. Thank you for being our rock.

Vidhya Prakash, MD, Director of SIU AWIMS

May 2025

Please observe a moment of silence to honor those that we lost in Chatham, Illinois on April 28, 2025. Our hearts are with the families who lost their loved ones and we remain steadfast in our commitment to holding up our community during this difficult time.



The AWIMS Advisor Editorial Board



Dr. Vidhya Prakash
Editor-In-Chief

"You cannot swim for new horizons until
you have courage to lose sight of the shore."
William Faulkner



Dr. Ayame Takahashi
Associate Editor

"It took me quite a long time to
develop a voice, and now that I
have it, I am not going to be silent."
Madeleine Albright



Ms. Bredina Haden
Associate Editor

"Anytime women come together with a collective
intention, it's a powerful thing. Whether it's sitting down
making a quilt, in a kitchen preparing a meal, in a club
reading the same book, or around the table playing cards,
or planning a birthday party, when women come together
with a collective intention, magic happens."
Phylicia Rashad

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AWIMS Spotlight: Camille Dunkley, MD



Role at SIU Medicine:

Assistant Professor, Family and Community Medicine
Director, Division of Addiction Medicine
Addiction Fellowship Director

Born and raised: Born in New York, New York and raised in Oxford, England and Greenville, Illinois

Birthday month: April

Family: Mum, Dad, Brother, Sister, Sister-in-law, 2 nieces, and 2 nephews

Favorite Childhood Book: *Double Act* by Jacqueline Wilson. I thought it was funny and most probably the first book I read multiple times.

Hobbies: Traveling, going for walks, making things such as homemade soap and baking, etc.

Personal Heroes: Mum and Dad

Most Embarrassing Moment (you are willing to share): I was 10 years-old on a school trip and there was a bathroom break. The line for the girls' bathroom was very long so the teacher made five of us use the boys' bathroom, but I got locked in one of the stalls. It took so long to get me out that the trip was delayed, and the lunch break was shortened for the entire class.

What is your advice for achieving work-life balance? I try not to focus too much on the time allotment or the exact work-life ratio. However, when I am at work, I try to enjoy what I am doing. When I am not at work. I try to spend as much time doing things that I enjoy.

What is the best piece of advice a mentor gave you? *How do you eat an elephant?* One bite at a time. During times that I feel like I am multitasking and working on several projects at the same time, I remember this phrase and it helps me not to feel overwhelmed, stay focused, and complete the tasks at hand.

What is your unique contribution to SIU SOM? I work with patients with substance use disorders. I try to create various service models that decrease stigma and increase access to care.

Around Campus

Women's History Month

March was Women's History Month and this year's theme was "Moving Forward Together! Women Educating and Inspiring Generations." Associate Editor of the AWIMS Advisor, Bredina Haden, asked AWIMS what this meant to them. Below are some inspiring responses. Please take a moment to reflect on the theme's meaning and thank all who have inspired you.

As we celebrate Women in Medicine Month under the theme "Moving Forward Together! Women Educating & Inspiring Generations," we reflect on the profound impact women in healthcare have had, not only on the medical field but on generations of aspiring professionals. Their stories of resilience, leadership, and mentorship continue to shape the future of medicine. In the spirit of Michelle Obama's powerful quote, "We should always have at least three friends in our lives - one who walks ahead who we look up to and follow; one who walks beside us, who is with us every step of our journey; and then, one who we reach back for and bring along after we've cleared the way," we recognize the importance of this supportive and expansive network.

In medicine, we are all part of this dynamic web. There are those who inspire us with their groundbreaking work and leadership, showing us what is possible. There are those who walk beside us—colleagues and peer mentors who offer guidance, share experiences, and uplift us during our most challenging moments. And, there are those who we bring along, creating pathways and opportunities for future generations to thrive in medicine, just as others did for us. It is an endless circle of support. Together, we can pave the way for a more inclusive and fulfilling future in healthcare and medical education. - Dr. Susan Hingle

I am inspired by the connections women make with each other within departments and also across the SIUSOM system. I feel most are intentional in helping each other flourish and succeed.

The efforts to educate and inspire are evident in the activities offered by AWIMS, cHOP and others which give opportunity for women to grow, connect, and shine. - Tracie Johnson

Women's History Month Continued

It means a sisterhood of support. It means lifting each other up without judgement. I do feel supported here at SIU. Whenever I feel like I am at my lowest point, one of my sisters helps to lift me up. Anonymous

We work together as a team to provide care, education, and encouragement.
- Andrea Perkins

I have so many mentors at SIU School of Medicine who have taught me how to use my voice and speak up for things I believe in. I am thankful that we have so many leaders who listen and genuinely care about our wellness and professional development.

#SIUMedicineProud!

Anonymous

For generations, middle- and upper-class women were restricted to the woman's sphere, the home. Then, the Beecher sisters broke that model. Catharine, the eldest, pushed for education, and founded a school for girls. Harriet wrote books and traveled around America, talking about social issues. Isabella, the youngest sister, entered the public sphere, advocating for women's suffrage and other social rights. Each sister made room for the next to go further. When I was a high school teacher, the city decided to only give raises to the (overwhelmingly male) janitorial staff, but not to the teachers. One of those men told me that was fair, because he was supporting a family, and if I needed money, I could just get married. Women should build the ladder, for ourselves, our colleagues, and the next generation of women. Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ran for President, and former Vice President Kamala Harris almost won the office 8 years later. A society that allows all of us to make our best contributions at work, while maintaining time and space for our hobbies, interests, and families. By pushing for paid parental leave, we can make parenting a joint effort, and eliminate the motherhood penalty. We move forward pulling up all our sisters to a more just and equitable world. - Carolyn Pointer

cHOP-AWIMS Networking Event for Civil Service Employees

Through support from AWIMS and cHOP, a networking event was held on January 28th for civil service employees over the lunch hour. The event fostered connection between SIU Medicine employees working in an administrative role and civil service (CS) employees who serve as AWIMS mentors. In addition, several employees with years of experience in CS roles were on hand to answer any questions.

Approximately 25 people were in attendance and enjoyed bonding over hot chocolate and teas. Special thanks to Dr. Jody Lack and Ms. Tracie Johnson, co-chairs of cHOP's Wellness pillar, for bringing the event to life. Ms. Johnson is also co-chair of the AWIMS Mentorship and Career Advancement Committee.



Left to right: Dr. Jody Lack and Ms. Tracie Johnson

3rd Annual Kenniebrew-McNeese Conference

Once again, the Kenniebrew-McNeese Conference provided an excellent mix of plenary speakers and interactive workshops. With a theme of moving from awareness to action and creating the conditions for sustainable engagement and meaningful change, the conference was the perfect forum for inspiration and enlightenment.

Dr. Yolanda Wimberly, Senior Vice President and Chief Health Equity Officer at Grady Health System, delivered the Kenniebrew lecture. Dr. Wimberly spoke about her leadership journey as a health equity advocate, transforming the health of the community through a data-driven and collaborative approach. The opening plenary was delivered by Dr. Lois Lee, Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Emergency Medicine at Harvard Medical School, with a call to raise awareness about firearm injuries in children. Dr. Lee spoke about learning to use her voice to advocate for children harmed by preventable firearm injuries.

Our AWIMS members were well represented by Dr. Aysha Rafaquat, Dr. Robert Robinson, and Carolyn Pointer, who led an interactive workshop on the link between values and professional brand. During this impactful session, participants had an opportunity to craft their elevator speech.

Medical students also had an opportunity to present their work on overcoming bias and treating various medical conditions in underserved communities. Other workshops addressed the treatment of gender-diverse individuals within the SIU School of Medicine.

Neurodivergence within the medical community was another inspirational workshop which addressed wellness issues for women in medicine. My biggest regret was not being able to attend all of the workshops offered. This conference represented some of the best and most meaningful work done by the amazing health care professionals at SIU School of Medicine.



Left to right: Dr. Robert Robinson, Dr. Aysha Rafaquat, and Carolyn Pointer

AWIMS in the Community

Adopt a Family

The AWIMS Community Engagement Committee, in collaboration with the Faith Temple AME Church's Women's Missionary Society, spread holiday cheer by adopting a family through the Contact Ministries Adopt-a-Family program. This initiative supports families residing in our shelters during the holidays and those in independent housing within a few years of exiting shelters.

Deserving families benefit from the compassion and generosity of our AWIMS community, celebrating Christmas with gifts given to them with love.



Faces of Medicine

Did you know that Black women physicians account for only 2.8% of US doctors? On December 11th, the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, AWIMS, and the SIU System co-hosted a screening of the groundbreaking and powerful documentary, Faces of Medicine. The film features five Black US-based women physicians, highlighting their struggles and triumphs in the healthcare system.

Pictured below, left to right:

Top row: Dr. Kemia Sarraf, Dr. Wendi El-Amin, and Dr. Khama Ennis

Bottom row: Ms. Lesley Barfield, Dr. Vidhya Prakash, and Dr. Sheila Caldwell



SIU leaders were fortunate to have a discussion with the trailblazing physician who created the film, Dr. Khama Ennis. To learn more about the film, donate, or schedule a screening of the film, visit www.facesofmedicine.org/.



Articles and Quotes

Walls Are Mirrors: Messages Delivered in Physical Environments

Mortality Among US Physicians and Other Health Care Workers

Faculty Characteristics and Surgery Trainee Attrition

Igniting Impact: AMWA's 110th annual meeting

Understanding the Impact of Menopause in the Workplace



"My dad encouraged us to fail. Growing up, he would ask us what we failed at that week. If we didn't have something, he would be disappointed. It changed my mindset at an early age that failure is not the outcome, failure is not trying. Don't be afraid to fail."

Sarah Blakely, founder of Spanx



"I paint flowers so they will not die."

Frida Kahlo, Mexican Artist



"I feel safe in the midst of my enemies; for the truth is powerful and will prevail."

Sojourner Truth, American women's rights activist



"Stand up, stand straight, be tall. Use your voice. Don't ever feel that you are less than or that you should ever be a shrinking violet. No matter what people say to you, no matter what they might try to make you feel, that you have your full humanity and you should stand tall."

Helen Zia, American journalist and activist for Asian American and LGBTQ rights



A Call to Action to Address Health Inequities in the Healthcare Workforce

By Dr. Ayame Takahashi

An article recently published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* revealed alarming and sobering statistics. The National Vital Statistics System was reviewed over a three-year period spanning January 2020 through December 2022. Occupation, sex, race, and ethnicity were the data points reviewed. As the authors compared mortality rates across all professions, not too surprisingly, those in the healthcare professions had lower mortality rates compared to those not in healthcare. People in healthcare, especially physicians, tend to have better access to healthcare, and also have the economic means to obtain medications and resources in order to maintain their health. It has been a well-established fact that women, in general, tend to live longer than men, as evidenced by the statistics of this study for the general population. However, this advantage was not apparent within healthcare. Female physicians had higher mortality than male physicians due to neoplasms and chronic lower respiratory diseases. Black workers had higher mortality than white workers across all disciplines, the disparity highest within the physician population. Mortality for Black female physicians was higher than all other physician subgroups. Mortality for Hispanic workers in certain healthcare positions, including physicians, was higher as well.

There is no question that we have come a long way from the days when women were not even allowed into medical schools. The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) data shows that as of 2023, women are now in the majority of applicants and graduates in US medical schools. Undoubtedly, the reasons for this disparity in overall health are multifactorial. The culture within medicine has long been deemed as toxic, from the long hours to battles with insurance companies to cover basic medications for treatment, to name just a few things clinicians are up against. But why the increased toll on women and historically marginalized groups of people? Stress levels are likely higher due to discrimination, outright aggression, and microaggressions from both patients and colleagues. Further, women still carry the burden of doing the majority of housework and childcare, although this may be gradually shifting as the overall culture shifts.

A Call to Action... Continued

There is increased emphasis and awareness on the need for “self-care”, which in some ways is a doubled-edged sword. *The Pitt* is a very popular medical drama that depicts a 15-hour shift in an urban emergency room. I suspect that prior to the creation of the script, the show runners must have polled ER healthcare workers about what the worst shift they ever worked was like, and then proceeded to put the majority of these situations into this one shift for the show. The diversity of the physicians, healthcare workers, and patients in this show is superb. The stressors experienced by medical professionals are also very well depicted. Short staffing, lack of resources, bureaucratic demands, and patient satisfaction scores are all part of the scene. A nurse is physically assaulted by a patient. She refuses to take the rest of the shift off, but talks about wanting to leave the profession entirely. A Black female chief resident has a miscarriage during the shift but does not let any of the attending physicians know until much later. All of the staff check in with each other, making sure they are all doing ok during what is likely one of the most stressful shifts ever worked. Everyone claims to be ok, even when they aren’t. New medical students, when being introduced to the ER rotation, are told in passing that they might not have time for lunch. These sacrifices of personal wellbeing are depicted as noble and heroic. The emotional toll of the work is acknowledged with a nod towards normalizing psychotherapy.

If we look at the struggles of the characters in *The Pitt* and reflect on the stressors they experience, the show is quite accurate. With the issue of self-care in the case of the nurse and the chief resident, in both cases, they were encouraged to leave to recover from their injuries/miscarriage, but both declined due to the sense of responsibility to the team and the patients. The need for self-care was acknowledged, but the healthcare team members worked in a system that made it difficult for them to leave, with never-ending crises in a situation where there were not enough staff to care for everyone. The system must change before medical professionals are able to engage in self-care without guilt.

There are no easy answers to this very complex problem. We need to stop giving mixed messages of encouraging self-care, but rewarding and recognizing only those who are willing to work overtime all the time. We also need to advocate within our institutions for workplace flexibility and allowances for childcare responsibilities. We need to continue to check in with each other and give each other permission to say “no” to more. More attention needs to be given to issues of intersectionality. All the stress experienced by women may be double for women of historically marginalized backgrounds. Providing upstander training and actively advocating for our colleagues are a few examples of how we change our culture for the better and save the lives of our patients and our healthcare workers. Together, we are stronger!

References:

Patel VR, Liu M, Worsham CM, Stanford FC, Ganguli I, Jena AB. Mortality Among US Physicians and Other Health Care Workers. *JAMA Intern Med*. Published online February 24, 2025. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2024.8432

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