

A profile of three organizations helping cultivate cultural responsiveness in the ophthalmic community.

Student National Medical Association Ophthalmology Specialty Interest Group

TEMITOPE ADELEKE

The ophthalmology community does not currently represent the patient population adequately. Underrepresented minority groups compose only approximately 6% of practicing ophthalmologists.¹ Similarly, 6.3% of incoming residents in the 2019–2020 academic year were underrepresented in medicine (URiM) students.² Some reasons for underrepresentation in ophthalmology include a low level of interest, late exposure to the field, lack of racially diverse role models, and competitive residency programs. Several organizations, however, are resolving to change these issues.

The Student National Medical Association (SNMA) Ophthalmology Specialty Interest Group (OSIG) is a safe and supportive community for minority future ophthalmologists. The SNMA OSIG helps URiM students interested in ophthalmology become exceptional residency candidates. The goals of the student-run organization are to introduce the field of ophthalmology to URiM premedical and medical students and provide mentorship, residency application assistance, access to research opportunities, surgical skills workshops, and networking opportunities so that students begin to see a career in ophthalmology as attainable.

The SNMA OSIG promotes diversity in ophthalmology and aims to reduce disparities in eye care. It is hosting an in-person program for premedical and medical students attending the 2023 SNMA Annual Medical Education Conference, including a panel discussion, skill set workshop, and networking opportunities. For information about serving as a speaker or mentor, email ophthalmology@snma.org.

1. Xierali JM, Nivet MA, Wilson MR. Current and future status of diversity in ophthalmologist workforce. *JAMA Ophthalmol*. 2016;134(9):1016-1023.

2. Atkuru A, Lieng MK, Emami-Naeimi P. Trends in racial diversity among United States ophthalmology residents. *Ophthalmology*. 2022;129(8):957-959.

LGBTQ+ PEARLS FOR COLLEAGUES

Experts share ways to foster inclusivity in the workplace and work toward inclusive policies.



A conversation with Jessica Weinstein, MD; Roberto Diaz-Rohena, MD; Steven Sanislo, MD; and Brandon Johnson, MD, and moderated by Vivienne S. Hau, MD, PhD, and Basil K. Williams Jr, MD



LISTEN NOW

"It's also easy to fall into the habit of just ignoring the topic altogether, especially as a gay man. The medical community was so conservative when I was training, and I didn't talk much about my personal life. I kept to myself for the most part. That does so much damage not only to the person who is keeping those secrets but also to the greater community that doesn't realize the pressures that they're putting on underrepresented groups. That's why it is important to have representation and talk about these issues so that the next generation doesn't have to be afraid to be authentic."

— BRANDON JOHNSON, MD

Surgical retina specialist, New York Retina Center

Minority Ophthalmology Mentorship

CATHERINE ANDERSON-QUIÑONES, BM

Diversity and inclusion matter for patient care and outcomes. Studies have shown that patients are more likely to comply with medical advice and treatment when cared for by physicians who look like them and share their cultural competency.¹ The Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring (MOM) program was established in 2018 to increase diversity in ophthalmology by helping qualified students who are underrepresented in medicine become competitive ophthalmology residency applicants.



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DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN OPHTHALMOLOGY



MOM is open to first-year medical students in Liaison Committee on Medical Education or the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation programs. Applicants submit college and medical school

transcripts, a letter of recommendation from someone in their academic or work life, and a personal statement. Students who are selected for the program are paired with an ophthalmologist mentor who will help guide them through decision making and medical career planning. MOM members are expected to engage with their mentors three to four times per year. (To learn more about MOM, scan the QR code.)

PROGRAM BENEFITS

Of the 206 students across 91 US medical schools who have completed the MOM program to date, 32% and 80% are the first person in their immediate family to attend college and medical school, respectively.² As the MOM program has evolved and been refined, the match rate for program participants has increased. Of the 12 students who participated in the 2021–2022 program, 75% matched

in ophthalmology—which is above the 70% success rate reported for all US participants. Further, all 16 of the 2022–2023 MOM participants matched in ophthalmology.

A pilot MOM match prep program was initiated this year. Participants are paired with a second ophthalmologist-mentor who serves as a match prep coach and have access to a social media forum to engage with other members. Programming includes workshops that address the application timeline and how to convert a CV to the SF Match ophthalmology application, secure strong letters of recommendation, finalize plans for away rotations, craft a personal statement, and prepare for Zoom interviews. The pilot program also provides access to grants to support students participating in away rotations.

The MOM recruitment process has also evolved. Instead of being open to premed through third-year medical students, applications are now limited to those in their first year of medical school. This helps provide more relevant programming,³ including foundational programming focused on introducing students to ophthalmology, creating a successful application for ophthalmology residency, and the impact of eye disease on marginalized

populations. MOM participants can advance to programming targeted to second-year medical students based on their participation and engagement with the program. Second-year programming provides resources for step 1 of the US Medical Licensing Examination. Additional workshops and networking opportunities occur at MOM's student engagement seminar, held during the annual AAO meeting.

Continued mentorship and support are provided during the third and fourth years of medical school. MOM members receive assistance with submitting a competitive ophthalmology residency application and guidance for entering an ophthalmology residency program.

CONCLUSION

The MOM program is not only actively supporting diversity in ophthalmology but also inspiring future ophthalmologists to participate in a lifetime of advocacy.

1. Nguyen J. The language of cultural responsiveness. Center for Health Progress. February 16, 2016. Accessed February 13, 2023. https://centerforhealthprogress.org/blog/the-language-of-cultural-responsiveness/?gclid=CjwKCAIA3KefBhByEiwAizLDHAIJh849Mn110UCXuqPgqiwLts_eTCKE2GirndGleNV29LZSssI4RoCw-twQAvD_BwE

2. Minority ophthalmology mentoring empowering the next generation - 2021-22 annual report. 2022. American Academy of Ophthalmology. Accessed February 13, 2023. <https://www.aaopt.org/Assets/ef33f5a3-445b-40cd-a97c-3886521df63/637986087718500000/2021-22-annual-report-web-pdf?inline=1>

3. Minority ophthalmology mentoring. Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring Program - American Academy of Ophthalmology. Accessed February 13, 2023. <https://www.aaopt.org/minority-mentoring>

Sharing the Scope

ELISHEBA ODEI

Matching into ophthalmology is increasingly competitive. Allopathic and osteopathic medical students without home ophthalmology programs must overcome the hurdle of accessing the information, opportunities, mentorship, and experiences necessary to become competitive ophthalmology resident candidates. Sharing the Scope hosts virtual panel discussions and a program series that helps close the gap for this student population. At the time

of this writing, the organization's virtual programming had reached more than 400 US and international premedical and medical students in a span of 2 months.

Virtual programming has included the topics of diversity in ophthalmology and advice from residents on how to match without home ophthalmology programs and secure away rotations. Past sessions are on our YouTube page, and upcoming programming is found on Instagram

(@SharingtheScope). In the future, Sharing the Scope hopes to provide students with more tangible resources including mentorship, ophthalmic clinical experiences, and access to research projects and scholarships.

The organization remains committed to creating a centralized base of resources and opportunities so that no medical student feels alone or lost on their journey to matching into ophthalmology. ■