



The new diverse physician mentors are: [Top row, left to right] Dr. Bunmi Fatoye, Dr. Michael Johnson and Dr. Katrina Leong. [Bottom row, left to right] Dr. Shayne Taback, Dr. Rizqa Sulaiman-Baradien and Dr. Roopesh Kansara.

Diverse physician mentorship program launches to support medical students

September 27, 2024 — The Max Rady College of Medicine (<https://umanitoba.ca/medicine/>) has launched a new mentorship program to connect students with mentors from diverse backgrounds.

Six physician mentors will provide identity-based mentorship to the diverse medical student body. The new roles are: Black physician mentor, disabled physician mentor, Filipino physician mentor, Jewish physician mentor, Muslim physician mentor and 2SLGBTQIA+ physician mentor.

“We are in a complex global environment with intensifying polarization,” said Dr. Marcia Anderson, vice-dean Indigenous health, social justice and anti-racism, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences.

“The increase in antisemitism, rise in Islamophobia, attacks on trans human rights and gender affirming care, and racist backlash all impact our medical community. They influence the experiences of our learners, and we want to provide them with a safe space to seek guidance and mentorship. We also want them to know that their unique identities and experiences bring value to the medical school environment and ultimately to the patients they will see.”

Anderson said that while not every medical student will see themselves represented in the current diverse physician mentor roles, this is a starting point and not an end point.

Students can reach out to the mentors if they are interested in becoming a mentee.

Meet the mentors

Dr. Bunmi Fatoye – Black physician mentor (<https://umanitoba.ca/medicine/black-physician-mentor>).

Dr. Bunmi Fatoye, an assistant professor of community health sciences, is a public health leader. She was born in Canada to Nigerian parents and has practiced medicine in Winnipeg for more than 20 years.

“I became a physician mentor because I feel like I can give back to the Black community,” Fatoye said. “I have the skill set to be able to transfer it to upcoming learners and share my experiences with them. I will be on the journey alongside the students as they find their career paths. I’m thrilled to help.”

As a mentor, Fatoye said she will begin by asking students what they want so she can tailor the support, guidance and feedback to their needs. Understanding learners is crucial, she said, and a personalized approach is needed because mentees are not all the same and the Black population is diverse.

Students can contact Fatoye by [email](mailto:bfatoye2@wrha.mb.ca) (<mailto:bfatoye2@wrha.mb.ca>).

Dr. Michael Johnson – Disability physician mentor (<https://umanitoba.ca/medicine/disability-physician-mentor>).

Dr. Michael Johnson, an assistant professor of surgery, completed his medical school training and residency at UM. While he was born with sensorineural hearing impairment that worsened over time requiring cochlear implantation to hear, he said it is one of the best things that could have happened because it taught him how to really listen to a person – from one’s energy to facial expressions to demeanor.

“I understand what it takes when you have a barrier to achieve a goal and try to work around that,” Johnson said. “As a mentor, my plan is to try and take what is perhaps perceived as a disadvantage and see if we can turn it into an advantage.”

Johnson said that mentorship can range from an in-person chat, call or text to discuss concerns, or it can mean formal initiatives. His mentorship approach is to personalize his help based on the learner and their situation.

Students can contact Johnson by text at 204-290-3437.

Dr. Katrina Leong – Filipino physician mentor (<https://umanitoba.ca/medicine/filipino-physician-mentor>).

Dr. Katrina Leong, a lecturer in family medicine, is a second-generation Filipina-Canadian. She began practicing family medicine this year, which she says gives her a fresh perspective on navigating the early stages of a medical career.

“For me, becoming a mentor – especially for future Filipino medical students – is a way to give back, stay connected with my community and feel a deep sense of fulfillment,” Leong said. “It’s important to me that Filipinos continue to grow in the physician community because we are underrepresented. By mentoring, I hope to create a space where those coming after me feel seen, supported and empowered to thrive in their careers.”

Leong said that mentorship is not a one-time event but rather a two-way, longitudinal relationship built on trust and guidance. It offers opportunities for growth for both the mentor and the mentee, she said.

Students can contact Leong by email (<mailto:katrina.leong@umanitoba.ca>).

Dr. Shayne Taback – Jewish physician mentor (<https://umanitoba.ca/medicine/jewish-physician-mentor>).

Dr. Shayne Taback, an associate professor of pediatrics and child health, is responsible for the training of future physician-scientists as the founding director of the Clinician Investigator Program (<https://umanitoba.ca/medicine/postgraduate-medical-education-pgme/clinician-investigator-program>).

“With the challenges that Jewish students are facing today, I am grateful for the chance to use my mentoring and coaching skills to help learners enjoy medical school the way that I did and focus on learning how to be the best doctors they can be,” Taback said. “I hope learners will benefit from having a safe, respectful, non-judgmental presence who they can speak to, whether regularly or at specific times of challenge.”

Taback said that mentorship needs to be authentic and supportive. He uses a non-directive coaching style, in which he does not tell mentees what they should do but rather helps them develop and take action with their own best ideas about their situation.

Students can contact Taback by email (<mailto:shayne.taback@umanitoba.ca>).

Dr. Rizqa Sulaiman-Baradien – Muslim physician mentor (<https://umanitoba.ca/medicine/muslim-physician-mentor>).

Dr. Rizqa Sulaiman-Baradien, assistant professor of pediatrics and child health, is a medical geneticist. Born and raised in Cape Town, she struggled to find mentors in post-apartheid South Africa, and this is one reason she wanted to take part in the diverse physician mentor program.

“I couldn’t keep looking for a mentor, I had to become one,” Sulaiman-Baradien said. “I have a passion to help others, especially those who feel sidelined in the community or different. I feel like I can connect or relate to most people. No matter who you are or where you come from, the human condition is the same.”

Sulaiman-Baradien said there isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach when mentoring a student. She said the mentor has to take the time to get to know the mentee because what might have worked for one person, might not for another.

Students can contact Sulaiman-Baradien by [email](mailto:rsulaimanbaradien@hsc.mb.ca) (<mailto:rsulaimanbaradien@hsc.mb.ca>).

Dr. Roopesh Kansara – 2SLGBTQIA+ physician mentor (<https://umanitoba.ca/medicine/2slgbtqia-physician-mentor>).

Dr. Roopesh Kansara, an associate professor of internal medicine, immigrated from Tanzania to Canada when he was 23. He completed his medical school and residency training at UM, where he is now the program director of the adult hematology subspecialty program.

“When you enter the medical field, it can be quite daunting,” Kansara said. “You don’t know what your future is going to look like so it’s always nice to have mentors who can point you down the right path based on how they perceive you personally, your strengths and weaknesses and guide you along the way.”

Kansara said that he hopes to offer outstanding mentorship in the same way that his mentors provided him. He wants to be there for the students and let them know that they are not alone, and he is someone they can relate to.

Students can contact Kansara by [email](mailto:rkansara@cancercare.mb.ca) (<mailto:rkansara@cancercare.mb.ca>).

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