

AAEM Medical Student Ambassador: The Door to a Brighter Future

Nahal Nikroo
AAEM18 Medical Student Ambassador
AAEM/RSA Wellness Committee Member



In a tiny hotel room a few blocks away from the AAEM Scientific Assembly, I spent the end of every evening in stunned incoherence and happiness. Immersed in the day-to-day activities of an AAEM Medical Student Ambassador, I compulsively tried to reconstruct the events of the day, from meeting with my new mentor to learning about Airway, an open storytelling experience of emergency physicians, at AAEM. Despite my best efforts to envision what

attending the conference for the first time would hold for me, my expectations had been surpassed.

On a Wednesday evening in March and one month prior to the Scientific Assembly, I received the first email correspondence from my assigned AAEM physician mentor, signaling my acceptance as a Medical Student Ambassador. I had been matched with Dr. Loice Swisher! The truth was that I had already stopped believing I would ever find an emergency medicine advisor. As a student going to a relatively new medical school with no established home emergency medicine (EM) program, it had become quite a challenge finding an accessible EM mentor. Long recognized as an important pillar in academic medicine, quality mentorship has been cited as important for success, advancement, and productivity.^{1,2} Yet, finding a sustainable mentor-mentee relationship in the field of EM continued to elude me. I had long held a passion for emergency medicine, but that was not enough to help me pave my path. Unwittingly, I had stumbled across the AAEM Ambassador application and applied as a last desperate effort. Several months later, I received my first email correspondence, days prior to the start of the conference.

It seems almost impossible to delineate the precise impact that having a mentor like Dr. Swisher has done for me. Yet from this AAEM Ambassador connection, I was catapulted into the vastly connected world of emergency medicine. As an energetic, smart, and unbelievably kind woman, my new mentor ended her first email to me with, “Let me know what you’re interested in. If my Google is correct you are a medical student with an interest in ultrasound and presented at a cardiology conference in Europe last September and are Iranian. Sounds like you’ve been really busy.” Inspired by Dr. Swisher’s candor, I found myself opening up about my own struggles as a student as we made plans to meet at the conference. Dr. Swisher became a direct guide to my first EM conference experience, and shared a slew of valuable professional advice, such as the importance of having a Twitter account to stay connected to the professional world of EM.

Resourceful as usual, Dr. Swisher further ‘e-connected’ me with yet another mentor, Dr. Danya Khoujah, who epitomized my ideal future aspirations and opened me to the world of Women in Emergency Medicine and FemInEM. Throughout the conference, I had multiple opportunities to interact with my newly acquired mentors, attend committee meetings, and

go to networking events. It was not long before I discovered that my new mentors not only exemplify the grit, intelligence, and optimism of generations of successful emergency physicians, but they also stay involved and give back to the growing generations after them. As mentors, not only do these women provide direction and opportunity so that I may carve my own career pathway, they also serve as role models in personal areas of growth such as balancing family with work. Meeting them through the AAEM Ambassador program allowed me the opportunity to acquire crucial guidance and key professional opportunities, which I would not have been privy to otherwise.

Over the past year, my relationship with both mentors resulted in significant professional growth. This level of proximity to emergency medicine paid off tremendously. To this day, both of my mentors continue to provide astonishingly detailed and insightful commentary and guidance — emblematic of the extraordinary generosity that I received from several EM physicians and medical students I encountered almost a year ago at the AAEM conference.

As a current medical student, I had only caught a glimpse of what it means to be an emergency physician. However, through the AAEM Ambassador program, and more specifically through guidance from my mentors, I have learned so much about the profession and the countless leadership opportunities for medical students that had once been inscrutable and unattainable to me.

I was once told that national EM conferences are not made for medical students, but I now have my own experience to the contrary. I discovered to my surprise the number of emergency physicians willing to wholeheartedly mentor and support me and other students at AAEM. As I drove that fateful April morning to San Diego for my first day of conference, I barely realized I was embarking on an entirely new world of pivotal opportunities.

Through the AAEM Medical Student Ambassador Program I didn’t just find mentors — I found a sense of community. I often think of what Dr. Khoujah told me as I was ruminating to her about how she willingly reaches out and mentors so many. “I got to where I am by standing on the shoulders of giants; I am just paying it forward.”

AAEM19 is now recruiting its new batch of medical students for the ambassadors program. There is so much in store for these medical students, such a wealth of experience, and wonderful possibilities. My life has changed due to these connections, and now yours can as well! ●

Resources

1. Sambunjak D, Straus SE, Marusic A. Mentoring in academic medicine: A systematic review. *JAMA*. 2006;296:1103–1115.
2. Gray J, Armstrong P. Academic health leadership: Looking to the future. *Clin Invest Med*. 2003;26:315–326.