

Daryll C. Dykes, PhD '92, MD '95, JD, Named Chief Diversity Officer



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UPSTATE MEDICAL UNIVERSITY's new chief diversity officer (CDO) is looking to make “measurable change” at the institution and in the larger community. Daryll C. Dykes, PhD '92, MD '95, JD, was appointed CDO in May, adding to his responsibilities as clinician, teacher and researcher as professor of orthopedics.

After his CDO appointment, Dr. Dykes says he initially planned to spend some time gathering information and meeting with faculty and administrators. But within weeks, George Floyd's death at the hands of police sparked national outrage and an unprecedented conversation on race. “It's become an incredible and unique opportunity to make some meaningful change that might not have previously been possible,” Dykes says. “Members of our community across the spectrum are activated and motivated.”

At the impetus of students looking for ways to get involved, Dykes hosted a virtual forum on June 4 as a means for the campus community to discuss concerns about racism and brainstorm ideas for improvement. More than 300 students, faculty, and staff participated in the 90-minute conversation. “It was an opportunity to listen and to kickstart the conversation,” says Dykes.

That forum led to the creation of a task force that will meet over six weeks to propose institutional goals and action plans related to diversity and inclusion. “This is an action-oriented process with a short time line,” he says.

Dykes says his evolution into his role as CDO was organic. Since joining the Upstate faculty in 2018, he was naturally drawn to mentoring students of color and working with administrators on issues related to diversity. Upstate's interim chief diversity officer, Malika Carter, PhD, was primarily focused on legal and investigatory and mandated reporting functions. “There wasn't enough bandwidth to take on some of the more cultural leadership, visionary parts, of what the Office of Diversity and Inclusion could be doing,” he says.

In May, the office was reorganized, with Dykes becoming CDO and leading Upstate's Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI). A new Office of Institutional Equity was created to focus on investigatory and Title IX training functions. Carter will serve as interim chief equity officer through August.

“By moving our training and investigatory protocols to a separate office, we can better assist our employees and have a greater focus on our university's strategic plan to measurably increase diversity in all aspects of our campus-clinical care, research and education,” says Interim President Mantosh Dewan, MD. “Dr. Dykes brought many remarkable talents with him when he joined Upstate and I am pleased that he will serve as our chief diversity officer.”

A Syracuse native, Dykes is a graduate of Fowler High School and Syracuse University. He was one of the first students to complete Upstate's MD/PhD program, where his research

earned him several awards, including the John Bernard Henry, MD, Endowed Scholarship and Award and the David G. Murray, MD, Award for Excellence in Orthopedic Surgery. Before joining the Upstate faculty, he served as president and CEO of Medical and Surgical Spine Consultants of Minnesota and as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Policy Fellow in the United States Congress and FDA.

In addition to addressing campus issues, Dykes is excited to engage in productive and creative activity to impact the greater Syracuse community. For instance, he is involved in efforts to coordinate activities among chief diversity officers across academic institutions, government, and industry in the area. “Upstate is the largest employer in the region and we take care of most of the patients in the area,” he says. “I think this is a way to engage more closely with the community and expand what we're doing to achieve greater diversity, inclusion, equity and belonging, both on campus and with our neighbors.”

Dykes wants to engage alumni in the effort as well. He, Gregory Threatte, MD '73, and Sharon Brangman, MD '81, are working on plans for the first-ever reunion of the College of Medicine's black and brown alumni. “We are looking to reinvigorate connection and support with this group of alumni,” he says. “We are hoping to host a virtual event this summer and follow up with an in-person gathering next year.”

Xiuli Zhang, MD, Named Chair of Anesthesiology

XIULI ZHANG, MD, was appointed chair of the Department of Anesthesiology, effective May 11. Dr. Zhang has served as interim chair of anesthesiology since August 2019.

"I am pleased and honored to have Dr. Zhang lead the Department of Anesthesiology. The department has benefited greatly from her interim service and we look forward to her continued leadership as chair," says College of Medicine Dean Lawrence Chin, MD, of the appointment.

In her six months as interim chair, Zhang worked ceaselessly to ensure that clinical operations continued without interruption while maintaining standards of excellence. She also recruited five physicians who will join the faculty this year and maintained collaborative relationships with faculty, administration, and surgical and nursing teams.

"Throughout my time as interim chair, I have been struck by my encounters with many hard-

working, passionate colleagues who, across disciplines and specialties, are dedicated to working together for the greater good," says Zhang. "They have motivated and inspired me, and my ambition to lead our department into an era of growth and success is greater than ever."

Zhang earned her medical degree from Qingdao Medical College, China. After coming to the United States, she became a research fellow in the field of immunology at Tufts University School of Medicine. She completed an internship in general surgery at Brooklyn Hospital Center prior to entering anesthesiology residency at Upstate Medical University in 2002.

After completing her training as chief resident (2004-05), Zhang continued at Upstate as a faculty member. She has been recognized several times as Attending of the Year and received the Upstate Gold Standard Award in 2012.



Xiuli Zhang, MD

Urology Professor Lands Federal Grant to Continue Kidney Cancer Research

Upstate Medical University urology professor Mehdi Mollapour, PhD, has been awarded a \$400,000 grant from the Department of Defense (DOD) to continue and advance research on kidney cancer.

Dr. Mollapour is vice chair for translational research for the Department of Urology. The grant supports continuation of a decade-long research project into understanding kidney cancer biology and development of novel therapeutic strategies to treat patients. Mollapour, professor of urology, molecular biology and biochemistry, is also the director of kidney cancer biology at Upstate.

His research is published in high-impact-factor and is currently also funded by several grants from the National Institutes of Health and the National Cancer Institute.

"It's always exciting when any grant is funded," he says of the DOD award. "From small amounts to big amounts, to have the funds to be able to continue our work and pay students and pay researchers is exciting."



Mehdi Mollapour, PhD

College of Medicine Graduate Receives SUNY Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence



Jared Sweeney, MD '20

RECENT UPSTATE College of Medicine graduate Jared Sweeney, MD '20, has been awarded the prestigious SUNY Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence. Dr. Sweeney is the only student from Upstate to receive the award in 2020 and one of only 213 to receive it from among SUNY's 415,500 students this year.

Sweeney graduated at the top of his class and was one of only two students in his class of 170 elected to both medical honor societies, Alpha Omega Alpha and the Gold Humanism Honor Society. He began his residency in neurosurgery at Albany Medical Center on July 1.

Created in 1997, the Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence, recognizes students who have

best demonstrated, and have been recognized for, the integration of academic excellence with accomplishments in the areas of leadership, athletics, community service, creative and performing arts, campus involvement, or career achievement.

Sweeney said he felt lucky to learn from countless talented professors during his four years at Upstate but was particularly influenced by mentorship from Upstate Vice President for Academic Affairs Lynn Cleary, MD, who nominated Sweeney for the award, and Lawrence Chin, MD, dean of the College of Medicine and a neurosurgeon, who encouraged Sweeney's interest in the field.

Upstate Program Addresses Rural Psychiatry Shortage

Upstate's Rural-Academic Partnership Program (URAPP)—a program designed to address the shortage of psychiatrists in rural areas of Central and Upstate New York—has been recognized by the American Psychiatric Association

with a 2020 Psychiatric Services Achievement Bronze Award.

The award, presented in April, recognizes Upstate for using "collaboration and community engagement to extend psychiatric expertise to distressed populations and rural hospitals facing a shortage of mental health manpower."

"We're delighted to receive this honor for the community/rural track of our psychiatry residency program that addresses the need for well-trained psychiatrists in rural areas of Central New York," said Zsuzsa Meszaros, MD, PhD, director of the residency program in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

"Residents trained locally are more likely to enjoy working at rural settings and staying long term, which benefits underserved communities."

The program provides six rural medical institutions with the ability to partially fund a psychiatric resident in exchange for a five-year obligation from the resident to affiliate as an attending with the medical institution through Upstate's Department of Psychiatry.

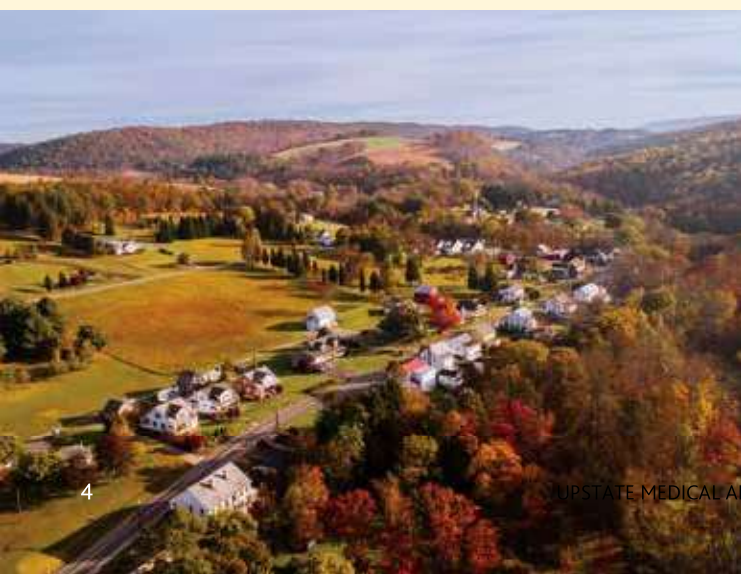
During the residency portion of the program, psychiatric residents will spend several months each year assisting at their institutions' inpatient psychiatric and outpatient adult psychiatry clinics. Upon completion of their residency training, the individual becomes an attending physician at their partner institution.

URAPP began in 2015. One of the first residents to complete the program is now employed as an attending physician at Samaritan Medical Center. Thirteen others are in the process of completing their residency or post-residency service obligations.

In addition to Samaritan Medical Center, institutions connected with URAPP include Binghamton General Hospital, Oswego Hospital, St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center, Mohawk Valley Psychiatric Center and Mohawk Valley Health System, St. Luke's campus.

"Residents trained locally are more likely to enjoy working at rural settings and staying long term, which benefits underserved communities."

—Zsuzsa Meszaros, MD, PhD



COVID-19 More Lethal to Patients with IDD

A new study published recently in ScienceDirect by researchers from Upstate Medical University and Syracuse University shows that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are more likely to die from COVID-19 than those without IDD.

According to the researchers, the disparity is likely related to a higher prevalence of comorbid diseases among those with IDD, and/or a higher percentage of people with IDD are living in congregate residential settings.

Their study, "Intellectual and Developmental Disability and COVID-19 Case-Fatality Trends: TriNetX Analysis," was published by ScienceDirect's *Disability and Health Journal*. The study included 30,282 people who were identified as COVID-19 positive in the TriNetX COVID-19 Research Network Platform.

"This is the earliest published study with empirical evidence showing death rates are higher for people with than without IDD at ages 0-17 and 18-74, but with similar rates at ages 75 and older," says Upstate Distinguished Service Professor Margaret Turk, MD, who holds academic appointments in physical medicine and rehabilitation, pediatrics and public health and preventive medicine. "These age difference trends in death rates were noted in people with IDD who demonstrated overall higher rates of health conditions considered a risk for severe outcomes with COVID-19 at all ages."

The researchers also found that individuals with IDD had a higher prevalence of comorbid circulatory, respiratory, and endocrine diseases across all age groups. While they could not test causality in this data, it is possible this partly explains the differences they found in case-fatality rates. Some of this difference may also be due to the higher percentage of individuals with IDD who reside in congregate settings—a characteristic the researchers could not account for in the study but are continuing to investigate.

"Our study highlights the age effect within a population who often die at younger ages and the presence of multiple health conditions across all ages as risk factors for poor outcomes—and merits further investigation of COVID-19 outcomes in this and other disability groups," says Turk.



Alumni Generosity Supports Student Emergency Fund During Pandemic

IT'S NO SECRET that obtaining a medical education is an expensive undertaking. In addition to tuition and housing, students face significant expenses in taking national STEP exams and traveling for residency interviews.

The shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated those financial pressures for many. That is why the Medical Alumni Foundation partnered with the Upstate Foundation to launch the Student Retention Emergency Fund, which provides assistance to students who experience sudden and/or significant financial hardship that may impact their ability to remain in school.

Established in March, the fund has already assisted 80 College of Medicine students.

"We've had requests from students who helped support themselves with part-time jobs that were lost during the pandemic," says Lori Murphy, associate director of the Medical Alumni Foundation. "Some students had counted on support from parents, whose income was negatively impacted by COVID-19. We've also received requests for assistance from many students whose STEP exams were canceled due to the pandemic, and the only available tests to reschedule were in far-flung cities resulting in significant unexpected travel expenses."

According to Paul Norcross, executive director of the Medical Alumni Foundation, the fund raised \$60,000 in its first three months. "We are grateful to alumni for helping our students through this difficult time and we hope that generosity will continue. COVID-19 has caused a lot of financial uncertainty for many, and I expect that will continue to impact our medical students through this academic year."

Norcross stresses that supporting this fund is separate from Alumni Annual Fund gifts, which assists students with textbooks, scholarships, and programming. "The Emergency Fund is just that—emergency assistance to help students complete their medical education. We don't want to lose future physicians due to financial fallout from the pandemic."

To support the Student Retention Emergency Fund, please visit <https://medalumni.upstate.edu/donate>.

Upstate Holds First Virtual Commencement Celebrating “Graduates and Heroes”

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Upstate Medical University conducted its first-ever virtual Commencement on May 1, conferring degrees on 419 students who graduated from its four colleges.

Interim President Mantosh Dewan, MD, the college deans, and other speakers emphasized Commencement’s unique circumstances and praised members of the class of 2020 for their resilience and dedication to a field centered on helping others.

“More than ever, we need each and every one of you,” Dewan said. “Close your eyes and walk across a splendid stage and out into a temporarily troubled world as a graduate and a hero.”

Dewan thanked students’ families for their unwavering support and the Upstate faculty for imparting their wisdom. He touched upon the global coronavirus pandemic and how the class of 2020 will be called upon as humanitarians and medical professionals.

“Today we watch with pride as you commence onto an even bigger stage and embrace wonderful new roles,” he said. “These roles will call for the best in you. You are going out into a scary world not to do a job but to follow your profession; to fulfill your higher calling, to pursue your dreams of changing the world. You are everyday heroes that we so desperately need.

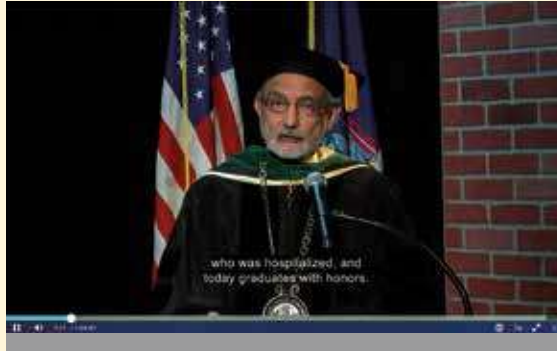
“Most importantly, you will be human at a time when a hug is more precious than gold. When you provide the only love and humanity to a suffering person isolated from everyone they love. And you will bring hope.”

New York Health Commissioner Harold Zucker, MD, JD, who has been at the center of the state’s COVID-19 response, was the ceremony’s featured speaker. Dr. Zucker highlighted efforts of the Upstate graduates during the pandemic, including the 65 students who graduated early to assist with efforts near New York City and those in Syracuse who were researching emerging COVID-19 literature to support clinicians on the front lines.

“I am immensely proud of all of you as you are the best this university stands for,” Zucker said. “You are embracing new professions at a moment of incredible public need that did not exist a year ago when I addressed the class that came before you.”

Zucker praised Upstate’s joint Commencement for representing healthcare’s necessary and growing focus on collaboration, which has proven beneficial in the state’s fight against COVID-19.

“The future I see for healthcare is not one of complacency but of resiliency and ingenuity and that’s what we have seen on the front lines fighting this pandemic in New York State,” Zucker said. “We have seen incredible resourcefulness, the strength derived from compassionate peer support; an unflagging dedication to making the system work better in the future.”



Upstate Interim President Mantosh Dewan, MD

During Commencement 2020, the College of Medicine awarded 168 degrees (149 doctor of medicine, 16 master of public health, three certificates of advance study in public health, and one MD/MPH). In addition, the College of Graduate Studies awarded two combined MD/PhD degrees.

Upstate’s virtual commencement broadcast, included a live chat feature where the more than 1,000 people viewing could also express congratulations to the graduates. Friends and families kept a steady stream of “congratulations” going throughout the one-hour, online ceremony. One commenter wrote, “You will make the world a better place than you found it!”

Upstate Graduates 65 Medical Students Early to Aid in COVID Fight

SIXTY-FIVE MEDICAL STUDENTS at Upstate Medical University became doctors April 10, graduating early under an executive order from Governor Cuomo so they could join other health care workers fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 20-minute virtual ceremony featured the recitation of the Physician’s Oath and remarks by College of Medicine Dean Lawrence Chin, MD.

The dean expressed his disappointment at not being able to share this proud moment with students in person. “As much as I wanted to share and celebrate these moments with you, I believe your sacrifice is the right thing to keep this terrible disease from causing more damage,” he said.

Students who elected to graduate early did so with the intent of going to hospitals to provide relief to an already strained health care workforce treating COVID patients.