



Generation to *Generation*

A new campaign for student scholarships provides opportunity for alumni to create a legacy at the College of Medicine while lessening student debt for future physicians.

It used to be that the rite of passage in becoming a doctor was sacrifice—long hours of studying in medical school, followed by long hours of residency training. While those experiences still hold true, there’s another factor in the mix: debt. For many medical school graduates, increasingly high tuition costs result in significant medical education debt.

Upstate Medical University’s College of Medicine is no exception. For decades, New York state residents were spared much of this burden, with tuition at the four state medical schools among the lowest in the nation. But state funding changes to SUNY campuses have radically altered tuition fees in a relatively short period of time. Little more than 10 years ago, College of Medicine tuition was \$16,000 annually. This year, the cost of tuition is \$43,670, with a total cost of attendance estimated at \$68,553 per year for New York state residents. While some of that tuition increase is related to a decrease in subsidy from New York State, it’s also a reflection of a national increase in the cost of higher and professional education, which has risen double the rate of inflation over the last 20 years according to *Forbes*. The Association of American Medical Colleges estimates the total cost of a four-year medical education from a public institution at more than \$250,000 and upwards of \$400,000 from a private institution.

Paying for medical school today is an entirely different enterprise from the experiences Paul Norcross hears about from alumni physicians as he travels the country in his role as executive director of the Upstate Medical Alumni Foundation. “Over and over, I hear how little it cost our baby

boomer and older alumni to obtain their medical education,” he says. “Many of them worked their way through school, paying their tuition with side jobs. And they’re grateful for the successful careers and comfortable lives that education provided for them and their families.”

The average debt for today’s Upstate College of Medicine graduate is more than \$220,000, a load

that actually becomes much larger due to compound interest and a limited ability to pay down loans during training years.

In an effort to reduce that burden, the Upstate Medical Alumni Foundation has launched the Generation to Generation Fundraising Campaign: an initiative to raise \$15 million in gifts from alumni and friends to support student scholarships.

“Upstate has a legacy of alumni supporting students, whether it’s through mentorship, hands-on training, or supporting scholarships,” says Norcross. “We’re asking alumni to consider endowing a scholarship so we can ease the burden of current and future generations of Upstate medical students. To all our alumni who have already established a scholarship, I say

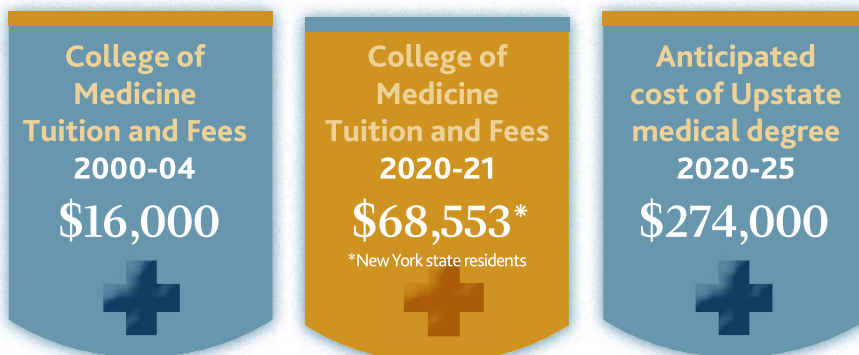
THANK YOU!! Any contributions made to your existing scholarship during the campaign will be recognized and counted toward the campaign goal.”

Thanks to the philanthropy of loyal alumni and friends, the Medical Alumni Foundation endowment has grown to more than \$31 million. Currently, the Medical Alumni Foundation administers 105 endowed funds that pay out more than \$869,000 in student support annually. By adding \$15 million to our endowment by 2025, we can greatly increase our student assistance.

A scholarship endowment can be started with a minimum of \$25,000 and a percentage of each endowed fund is awarded annually, based upon criteria set by the Foundation’s Finance Committee. An endowment can be created through an outright gift of cash or securities, an IRA, or even through a bequest. Regardless of the funding method, creating an endowed scholarship—or giving to an existing scholarship fund—is a meaningful way to honor the medical education that provided for a satisfying and successful career while at the same time helping launch future generations of physicians into the profession, says Norcross.

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—PAUL NORCROSS



The Gift of Choice

While the primary mission of the campaign is to lower student debt for Upstate medical graduates, Norcross says the secondary goal is to remove barriers for students to pursue careers in primary care. “There is evidence that students with higher debt weigh their income potential more heavily and are more likely to switch their preference to a high-income specialty career over the course of medical school,” says Norcross. “We’re trying to address the shortage of primary care providers by lowering the debt burden and allowing students the freedom to pursue primary care if that’s where their interests are.”

It’s a serious need. Only 30 percent of today’s doctors practice in one of the primary care fields (family practice, internal medicine, or pediatrics) compared with 70 percent 50 years ago, and it’s not due to lack of opportunity. In 2019, the National Resident Matching Program offered a record number of primary care positions, yet the percentage filled by students graduating from U.S. MD-granting medical schools hit a new low. Of the 8,116 internal medical positions offered, just 41.5 percent were filled by U.S. allopathic students.

The trifecta of a large number of doctors reaching retirement age, an aging population, and increased demand for services fueled by health insurance expansion through the Affordable Care Act may make that shortfall even more acute. A 2020 report from the AAMC projects a shortage of primary care physicians in the United States between 21,400 and 55,200 by 2033 and a shortage across non-primary care specialties of between 33,700 and 86,700 physicians.

In rural areas, the problem is already critical. According to a 2018 UnitedHealth Group report, rural Americans are almost five times as likely to live in a county with a shortage of primary care physicians compared to urban and suburban residents.

While there are many considerations that influence the choice of a medical specialty, education debt is clearly one factor driving medical school graduates away from service in physician-poor communities and primary care. A 2014 *Medical Education Online* study found that students with more student loan debt were also likelier to delay marriage, home ownership, and having children.

Scholarships for Upstate College of Medicine students are one way to remove barriers for today’s students and enable them to focus on the ideals that led them to pursue medicine. The Medical Alumni Foundation is committed to that endeavor and, due to the tremendous response of alumni during the “quiet phase” of the campaign, has raised \$6.5 million of its \$15-million goal.

“The Generation to Generation Campaign provides alumni the opportunity to create their own legacy at Upstate while helping to raise our endowment in support of student scholarships and the College of Medicine,” says Norcross. “And without the financial burden of full medical school tuition, Upstate medical students can pursue their careers and lives with the same freedom as earlier generations, while making a positive impact on health care access.”

Generation to Generation Excellence in Medicine

Campaign Leadership Committee

Zaven S. Ayanian, MD '59
Elliot Brandwein, MD '67 and Arlene Brandwein, MD '68*
Richard W. and Joan Doust
Robert A. Dracker, MD '82
Susan and Welton M. Gersony, MD '58
Bruce M. Leslie, MD '78
Albert F. Mangan, MD '54*
Angeline R. Mastri, MD '59
Carol Ann and Rudolph Napodano, MD '59
Patricia J. Numann, MD '65
Allan J. Press, MD '67
Michael H. Ratner, MD '68
Betty Reiss, MD '68 and Jacob Reiss, MD '68
Charles J. Ryan, III MD '82
Maureen L. Sheehan, MD '88
Barbara Sheperdigian and Ara A. Sheperdigian, MD '60*
Department of Surgery
Swift Family
Suzy and Herbert M. Weinman, MD '65
Frank E. Young, MD '56*

*deceased

Each member of the Campaign Leadership Committee has given or pledged a minimum of \$100,000 to the Generation to Generation Campaign. The Leadership Committee's generous support has raised over \$6,500,000 of the Campaign's \$15,000,000 goal to date.

Danielle Clifford, MD '21

Danielle Clifford '21 was attracted to the Upstate College of Medicine because of its Rural Medicine (RMed) program. A native of tiny Esperance, New York, she wanted to be able to provide the care she so often saw missing in her rural community, which impacted her family and the foster children her family helped care for.

From modest means, Clifford attended St. Lawrence University on a scholarship that paid for most of her undergraduate tuition. She majored in biology and participated in CSTEP, a program designed to help underrepresented students pursue graduate careers in STEM fields. It was through CSTEP that she met Ruth Hart, MD '80, an alumna of the St.

Lawrence CSTEP program, who encouraged her to apply to Upstate.

Due to the high cost, Clifford planned on funding her medical education through loans. But then the incoming Upstate student received amazing news: she was offered a full four-year scholarship that would pay for all of her medical school tuition and expenses, including a stipend for food. "I started crying," she recalls of getting the news.

Clifford's scholarship was the result of an anonymous alumni gift. "The donors were at a point in their lives where they had the means to give back and they wanted to do so in a way that would make a significant impact for an individual student," says Paul Norcross, executive director of the Upstate Medical Alumni Foundation. "Part of their motivation was gratitude toward Upstate for their own medical careers. They were also concerned about the rising costs of medical school and their intent was to minimize graduating debt, allowing the scholarship recipient to pursue any field of medicine without concern over income to pay back loans."

As part of Upstate's RMed program, Clifford enjoyed clinical rotations in rural communities in Upstate New York. Interested in a primary care field from the start, she ultimately chose psychiatry because she felt that's where she could make the biggest impact. Growing up, she witnessed her foster siblings struggle to obtain mental health services because of an absence of providers in her rural community. "Many of them needed psychiatric care and there really just wasn't a lot of access to it," she says.

After graduating from Upstate in May, Clifford began a psychiatry residency program at the University

of Massachusetts. She was accepted into a pediatric psychiatry track that will provide exposure to pediatric populations very early on and a fellowship position when she completes the residency.

In addition to receiving scholarship support, Clifford says Upstate alumni have also played an important mentorship role in her medical education. Many of her preceptors at her RMed clinical rotation sites have been Upstate medical alumni. Dr. Hart remains an important role model and guide, as well as a lifelong friend. "There's a great sense of community," she says.

Clifford says she's grateful that her scholarship enabled her to follow her passion without the pressure to pursue a higher-paying specialty. "A lot of my friends are hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt and have to consider how they can repay that," she says. "With no debt burden, I can go into something I really enjoy and where I know I will make a difference. I thank my donors from the bottom of my heart and hope to one day give back and help future medical students."



Classmate Tom Bedard, MD '21, Ruth Hart, MD '80, and Danielle Clifford, MD '21, after the RMed graduation ceremony.



SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Haley Burdge '22

For as long as she can remember, Haley Burdge '22 has wanted to be a pediatrician, inspired by her love of children and admiration for her own pediatrician and the relationships he built with patients and their families.

"Working with kids has always provided a source of meaning and happiness for me," Burdge says.

As an undergraduate at SUNY Binghamton, she volunteered at a pre-school. During her first two years of medical school, she participated with Peds Pals, providing tutoring and companionship to patients with cancer and blood disorders at the Golisano Children's Hospital.

But Burdge says her career choice is sometimes met with skepticism by others. "You know there's no money in that," she's heard countless times.

And while she's content to pursue a specialty based on her interests rather than prospective income level, she's also well aware of the cost of her medical education and the student loans she'll have to repay.

Burdge is grateful her loan burden will be less than it might have been, thanks to scholarships she's received from the Medical Alumni Foundation. As a second-year student, Burdge received the A. Geno Andreatta Scholarship, as well as a Student Citizen Award in recognition of her varied involvements (she's been a class officer each year, served as president of the Pediatrics Interest Group, and serves on the admissions committee). As a third-year student, she was one of two students awarded a \$15,550 Elliot Brandwein, MD '67 and Arlene Brandwein, MD '68 Scholarship, one of the largest scholarships the Foundation awards.

"Each of these was very meaningful and I was honored to have been chosen to receive them," she says. "The financial support has made me really grateful for the people who are contributing to help medical students such as myself. Once I'm able, I hope to do the same."



Haley Burdge '22

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Erik Baim '22

For Erik Baim '22, the most stressful aspect of medical school hasn't been the volume of material to learn or the high-pressure exams, but that moment each year when he has to click the button on his computer screen to submit his student loan application. "It's just hard to think about it adding up," he says.

Along with Burdge, Baim was fortunate to be selected in 2020 for the Elliot Brandwein, MD '67 and Arlene Brandwein, MD '68 Scholarship, which provided \$15,550 to support his third year at the College of Medicine. "I was in a Zoom meeting for a rotation when I received the email notifying me of the award, and when I saw the amount, I was honestly awestruck," he says. "A scholarship that large really does help reduce stress and anxiety about my student loans."

Raised in Auburn, New York, Baim attended St. John Fisher College as a first-generation student. "My parents are amazed that one of their kids not only graduated from college, but is about to graduate medical school," he says.

While his family has provided emotional support, Baim has had to navigate the path to becoming a doctor largely on his own. "The whole med school thing was all foreign to them," he says.

Baim plans to pursue a career in anesthesia, drawn to the combination of pharmacology and hands-on technique. "I spent many years helping my dad with home renovations and construction projects so I'm good with my hands," he says. "And I really enjoy the cerebral aspect of it."

The Brandwein Scholarship was not his first. As a second-year student, Baim was the recipient of the Frederick W. Sloan, MD '74 Scholarship. "There are so many extra expenses in medical school, from books to Step exams, which are insanely expensive. And now there will be costs to apply to residency programs," he says. "I'm grateful for the generosity of alumni who create these endowed scholarships to help students. They really do make an impact."



Erik Baim '22

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Kristina Bell '25

As a high school student at Jamesville-Dewitt High School in suburban Syracuse, Kristina Bell '25 took part in a monthly program for students interested in healthcare careers sponsored by a local hospital. The first speaker was Robert Dracker, MD '82, who talked about his career as a pediatrician.

"That really piqued my interest as something I would enjoy doing," recalls Bell. With no physician role models in her family, Bell navigated the process of getting to medical school—and very successfully—largely on her own. A first-generation college student, she attended SUNY Binghamton, where she doubled majored in biology and political science, graduating summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa.

As an undergrad, she tutored other students in biochemistry and served as a peer advisor for others interested in health professions. "I know what it's like to go into something blind and not have any background knowledge, connections, or mentorship," says Bell, who applied and was accepted to Upstate as a college sophomore through the Early Assurance Program.

Bell had planned to finance her medical education through student loans. But in early June, the incoming medical student received life-altering news: she'd been selected as the inaugural recipient of the Helen and Albert F. Mangan, MD '54 Scholarship, which will cover all tuition, housing, and incidental costs over her four-year medical education.

"It was probably the most euphoric moment that I've ever experienced in my life," says Bell of receiving the notification. "It's hard to start a career and a life when you're saddled with debt. Now that won't be a problem for me. It's so freeing to have this financial cushion that so many students don't have."

Nonetheless, the industrious Bell didn't quit any of her three summer jobs—working as a patient care advocate at Kinney Drugs Pharmacy, serving as a music and drama counselor at a community day camp, or as the mass singer at Assumption Church in downtown Syracuse. "Singing has been my passion since I was young," she says.

Only a few weeks in, Bell says it's far too early to know her future career direction, although she's still interested in pediatrics. "I want to keep an open mind and give myself the opportunity to experience everything," she says. "Because of this scholarship, I have the freedom to select whatever specialty I want, and I'm just so grateful for it."



Kristina Bell '25



DONOR STORY

Bruce Leslie, MD '78, endowed a scholarship to honor his father and his own medical education.

After Stanley D. Leslie, MD '51, died in 2009, his oldest son, Bruce Leslie, MD '78, decided to honor his father's memory by creating a scholarship in his name at the College of Medicine. Stan Leslie had graduated from Upstate magna cum laude and Alpha Omega Alpha. He served as a clinical professor at Upstate during his 40-year career as an obstetrician-gynecologist in Syracuse. He also served as president and board member of the Upstate Medical Alumni Foundation.

"Creating a scholarship in my father's name was an easy decision because he was always so loyal to Upstate," says Bruce Leslie. "My only regret is that I didn't do it when he was alive because he would have so appreciated it."

In addition to honoring his father, Leslie says he was motivated to support Upstate in thanks for his own medical education. Now a successful Boston-area hand surgeon, Leslie says he is appreciative of the career and lifestyle his Upstate education has afforded him.

"I had the option of attending Upstate, which cost \$1,500 a semester, or Tufts Medical School, which cost

many times that. It was an easy decision," Leslie recalls. "When I started my post-graduate education in Boston, it quickly became apparent that the education I received at Upstate was at least as good, if not better, than my Boston-educated peers. My class spent next to nothing for our Upstate medical degree. We should be grateful for the many opportunities our degree provided."

The Stanley D. Leslie, MD '51 Memorial Scholarship is awarded each year to a fourth-year student pursuing Ob/Gyn. Applicants are asked to write a one-page letter about themselves, and Leslie and his mother, now 92, read them and select the scholarship recipient. As a board member of the Upstate Medical Alumni Foundation, Leslie is typically on hand for the scholarship presentation and has met most of the scholarship awardees.

"My father loved being a doctor and providing high quality care to women," he says. "It's exciting to meet students with the same goals and help them carry forth those values and desires."



Bruce Leslie, MD '78, with his parents at his Upstate graduation and today



Maureen Sheehan, MD '88

DONOR STORY

Maureen Sheehan, MD '88, wants to help students pursue primary care careers.

In mid-2019, Maureen Sheehan, MD '88, started a second chapter of her life. After 24 years in California, the internist relocated to Bozeman, Montana, not far from where her youngest daughter was enrolled in college.

The change was inspired in part from many years working in hospice, which made her think about her own life priorities. One of the things she decided, now that two of her three children were out of college, was that she had more money than she needed. After reading an article about an Upstate medical student that reminded her of her own young self, she reached out to the Medical Alumni Foundation.

Sheehan has since established an endowed scholarship fund at the Upstate College of Medicine. Once fully mature, interest from the scholarship will fund an annual \$10,000 scholarship to be awarded to a fourth-year student with financial need who plans to pursue primary care.

"Some people wait until they die to do something like this. I was only 56, but I don't want to have regrets or have someone else decide what to do with my money," says Sheehan, who continues to work as a primary care physician in a clinic setting. "Helping young doctors get their start will give me tremendous satisfaction."

Sheehan says she hopes her actions motivate others to do the same. "There's a lot of us who have been very fortunate and make a nice living. I can tell you from working in hospice, you can't take it with you."