

Unique Perspectives

Celebrating Diversity, Inclusion and Equity in the University of Missouri's School of Medicine | Volume 3, Issue 5

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Contributor's Notes:

Brought to you by the School of Medicine Faculty and Staff Diversity and Inclusion Committees. To be disseminated 5 times per year.

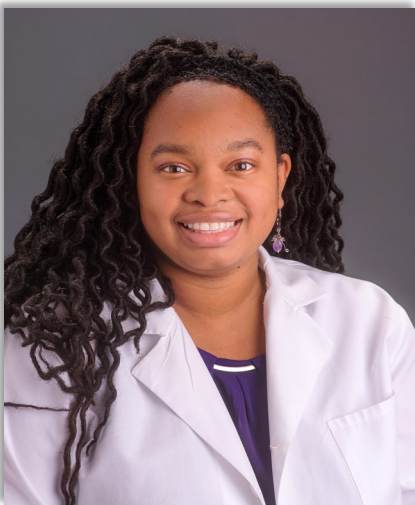
SOM Staff D&I Committee is accepting new members! E-mail [Ami Patel](#) if interested.

To nominate someone for the Spotlight or Give Me 5, or to submit D&I news and events, please e-mail [Amy Folkerts](#) and [Kelly Reeves](#).



To learn more about the University of Missouri School of Medicine's diversity and inclusion efforts, click [here](#).

In the Spotlight: Vovanti Jones, MD



Dr. Vovanti Jones, MD is a faculty member in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

What is your definition of diversity?

Diversity is when you enter a setting (whether a classroom, boardroom, hospital, etc.) and you are able to see people from different backgrounds. These differences can be in race, religion, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic status, sexuality, nationality or sometimes even physical features.

From your perspective, how do diversity and inclusion relate to one another?

When one is able to recognize diversity that is great; however, it is only one step in the process of making a truly understanding and cohesive society. It is not enough to just put people with different life perspectives in the same room, more so it is about making each one of those individuals feel that their voices are heard and those voices are of equal value to their peers. This is the idea of inclusion. In short, diversity is about recognizing the differences and inclusion is about bringing those differences together.

How do you think your intersecting identities affect your career as a physician?

When I look at myself and my career, I like to focus on three main identities. Being an African American female with a disability makes me a rarity within the medical community. Although the divide is slowly changing medicine as a whole, it's still considered a male-dominated field. Only ~35% of physicians are female. This is especially noted in leadership positions at academic medical centers, like here at MU. As I advance in my career, I often think of what opportunities may be available to me if this disparity doesn't change. On the clinical side, I still fight the battle for patients and other medical providers to not automatically assume that a female in healthcare is a nurse.

As an African American physician, I recognize that less than 4% of practicing physicians are African American and in 2022, less than 7% of graduating medical students are African American. In a nation that ~14% Black, this means that many patients may never see a physician who looks like them or has the same cultural background. It has been shown that patient outcomes can be better when the patient is able to connect with their physician based on these similarities. In my role as a physician, I often work with students at all education levels to help foster an interest in medicine. I work to build the needed relationships with my patients and seek out ways to provide education within the Black community, especially on medical topics that more highly affect these communities.

Being a physician with a disability had a major impact on my career path. Less than 3.5% of physicians identify as having a disability. When thinking of my career, I had to make a decision as to what field of medicine would be most supportive to me as a person. It's part of why I chose the field of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation because not only would I be able to care for individuals with disabilities, but I also get to work with others who truly understand how these

(Spotlight continued on page 2)

Activity Highlights

SOM holiday giving~ Oftentimes, the holiday season is the “most wonderful time of the year.” For lower-income families and those struggling to get or maintain basic needs and resources, it can bring added stress, frustration and shame. Several departments in the School of Medicine worked with community organizations again this year to provide Christmas gifts and necessities to families in need. One local group the Department of Ophthalmology works with annually is the [Voluntary Action Center](#). The VAC “provides resources for basic and emergency needs in the areas of health, employment, education and housing.” Since 1997, the Ophthalmology department has traditionally sponsored two families to provide them with household goods, grocery gift cards and Christmas gifts. The Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation worked with [The Columbia Foster and Adoption Project](#) again to support their Giving Tree holiday drive. Organized by PM&R’s diversity and inclusion committee, the department successfully purchased everything on three foster children’s wish lists (and more!) with enough left for a monetary donation to the CFAP. Although the holidays have passed, there is always an opportunity to help those in need as January brings us to recognize National Poverty in America Awareness Month. We thank all participating School of Medicine departments for their generosity and efforts in helping those less fortunate to enjoy the holiday season this year.

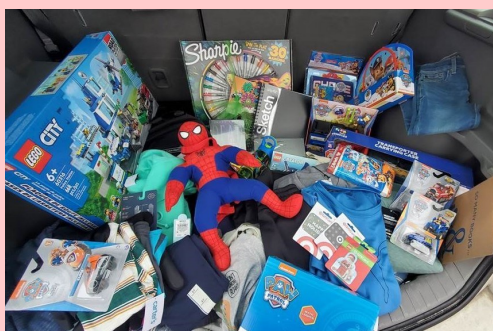
(Spotlight continued from page 1)

disabilities affect how individuals interact with their communities. Every day I am able to educate my patients on the diseases causing their disabilities all while being able to have intimate knowledge of some of the struggles they go through. Oftentimes, I learn different tricks of the disability trade from them.

How do you foster an environment that is inclusive and honors the uniqueness of each individual in your department and the School of Medicine?

I am the chair of the diversity and inclusion committee in the Department of PM&R. Our committee works to put together events, lectures and other educational experiences for our residents, faculty and staff. We have a yearly departmental retreat when we discuss some D&I topics and I run a social activity based on identifying the diversity within the department. Most recently we had a “Melting Pot Holiday Celebration” where I encouraged people to bring in foods that represented their cultural or religious traditions. As a committee we also put out a bimonthly D&I newsletter to the department. We also sponsor students through the [Visiting Student Diversity Program](#).

Pictured bottom left is Ophthalmology’s gifts for the VAC, below, PM&R’s gifts for the CFAP and right, The Giving Tree located every year at the Columbia Mall.



Give Me 5!



Dr. Michael Hosokawa, Ed.D is the Senior Associate Dean for Education and a professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine. To get to know Dr. Hosokawa better, we asked him these 5 questions:

1. If you could live anywhere or do anything, where or what would that be?

This is a difficult question. I grew up in Denver, Colorado and spent the early part of my professional life in Eugene, Oregon. Both are great places to live. I have been in Columbia for almost 50 years. I may be here another 50 years. If I could be anything, I would be an executive chef in a fancy restaurant.

2. What is your favorite food or restaurant?

My favorite restaurants are Roy Yamaguchi’s in Hawaii and Sushi Den in Denver. In St. Louis, Zia’s on the Hill, Maggiano’s and Oishi Sushi.

3. What is your favorite cultural/family tradition you celebrate every year?

As an American of Japanese ancestry, New Year’s Day is special. Families host an open house to welcome the New Year and feature Japanese food delicacies.

4. Tell us an interesting or fun fact about yourself.

I am a former NCAA Division One swimming coach (San Diego State), the first Columbia Swim Club coach and started the Stephens College swim team (program now closed).

5. If you could make one change in the world what would it be?

I would like a Christmas holiday season with the entire world at peace.

A Look Back...

In this issue, we take *A Look Back* at Dr. Howard A. Rusk, known as the “father of rehabilitative medicine”, a University of Missouri alumnus, and the namesake for Encompass Health and MU

Health Care’s Rusk Rehabilitation Hospital. Howard Rusk was born and raised in Brookfield, Missouri. After high school, he enrolled at the University of Missouri for his undergraduate studies shortly after World War I. His interest in helping those with disabilities sparked during his days in a college fraternity. One of the fraternity staff was an amputee struggling to get his work done using crutches. Rusk and his fraternity brothers raised money to buy him a prosthetic leg, remembering, “I can still see his face when we presented it to him. That leg meant everything to him, but it also meant a lot to me because it made me feel the crucial importance to a handicapped person of something the rest of us took for granted- the ability to walk”.

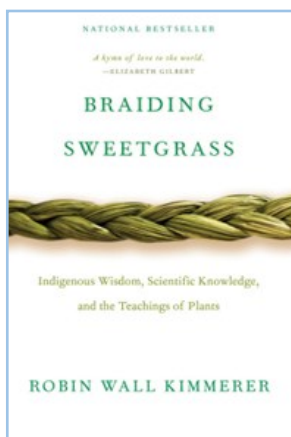


Rusk later graduated from MU and went on to earn his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. During Dr. Rusk’s service in the US Army Air Corps he noticed the lack of services for wounded and disabled servicemen. He subsequently developed a rehabilitative program that emphasized physical therapy, mental health and vocational training, often allowing the servicemen to return to active duty and eventually, civilian life. Later, Dr. Rusk’s rehabilitative program was adopted by every branch of the military. Once the war ended and with support from influential businessmen, he established the Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at New York University, now the Howard A. Rusk Institute of Rehabilitative Medicine. Dr. Rusk also went on to establish the first medical training program for rehabilitative medicine at the New York University School of Medicine.

Dr. Rusk’s work was known both nationally and internationally and in 1974, the University of Missouri named its rehabilitation center in honor of him. Rusk Rehabilitation Hospital in Columbia serves communities across the state of Missouri and has become a leading provider of inpatient rehabilitation for stroke, hip fracture, brain injury and other complex neurological and orthopedic conditions. The hospital is known for its interdisciplinary approach that includes case managers, dieticians, nursing, physicians and therapists to help patients reach their goals.

Dr. Howard Rusk died in 1989. He impacted thousands of lives, helping them achieve a better quality of life through his approach to rehabilitation. A quote from his autobiography states, “To believe in rehabilitation is to believe in humanity”. We acknowledge the contributions and dedication of Dr. Howard A. Rusk and appreciate how his legacy is carried on in the great work of our own Rusk Rehabilitation Hospital.

Brain Food



In November, we recognized Native American Heritage Month. The best-selling book *Braiding Sweetgrass* weaves memoir, science, indigenous knowledge and philosophy to share a unique way of viewing and interacting with our world. The author, Robin Wall Kimmerer, is a scientist and professor in Environmental and Forest Biology, as well as a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. The book shares her journey of learning to view the world from both Indigenous and Western cultures, incorporating practices from each.

For example, she discusses how one local school practices sharing gratitude for our natural environment of things both living and non-living, as well as for the community, by starting each day with a gratitude circle, thereby giving meaning and mission to the work of learning together. More radically, she advocates for animacy, the practice of seeing all things (living and non-living) as having agency, and how this change in perspective can alter how scientists and others understand the world around us. Quiet in tone, and meandering in storytelling, this book asks readers to open their minds and upend their Western ways of thinking. *Braiding Sweetgrass* is available at the Columbia public library and Kindle.

Calendar of Events

Upcoming events on campus and in the Columbia community

SAVE THE DATE

*The [Columbia Values Diversity Celebration](#) will be on **January 19, 7-9am** at the Holiday Inn Expo Center.

*The [MU Celebrates Martin Luther King Jr.](#) event is on **January 25, 6:30pm** at the State Historical Society of Missouri.

*Discussion— **Diversifying the Physician Workforce, February 9, 6-9pm** in the Patient-Centered Care Learning Center (PCCLC).

*The **Black Men in White Coats** documentary will be presented at the Rag Tag Theater on **February 11 and 12**. Time TBD.

*The SOM presents the **Diversity Dialogue Humanizing Medicine** series with **Beyond Bullets: The Intersection of Gun Violence in Medicine** on **February 15, 12-1:30pm** via Zoom.

*WIMMS presents the **Picture A Scientist** documentary at Memorial Union (main floor) on **February 17 and 19, 2-3:30pm** with a panel discussion on **February 24, 3-4:30pm** in Jesse Wrench Auditorium (Memorial Union).

Event dates and times are subject to change. Thank you!

Are you GAME for some diversity and inclusion trivia? Be the first to scan the code and submit your answers to win some Diversity and Inclusion Staff Committee items. Contest closes on January 20. Winner will be contacted the week of January 23. Good luck!

