M.D./M.P.H. Class of 2024 Begins Its Journey in First-Ever Virtual Orientation

New M.D./M.P.H. students at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine start their medical and public health journey in June each year, beginning with the first of several orientations before diving into their public health coursework.

Dr. Roderick K. King (top row, second from left) with other participants in the M.D./M.P.H. Class of 2024 virtual orientation.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the M.D./M.P.H. Class of 2024 orientation was held virtually this year on June 29 via Zoom,
where leadership and faculty convened to welcome new students. There were more than 60 attendees in the orientation, including new students, leadership, faculty, and staff.

“Even though the format this year is quite different from what we are accustomed to, this is still as momentous an occasion as any other one,” said Henri R. Ford, M.D., M.H.A., dean and chief academic officer of the Miller School. “We are here to recognize and honor your extraordinary accomplishments that have brought you here to the Miller School of Medicine. We are proud of you.”

Dean Ford also emphasized that their skills, dedication, commitment and compassion are needed today more than ever before – not only to face the challenges caused by the global pandemic, but also to effectively confront future emerging pathogens and other confounding illnesses that they will invariably face during the course of their medical career.

“We are confident that the Miller School will prepare you for this great challenge,” he said to the students. “I assure you that during the next four years, we will empower you to transform lives. We will inspire you to serve our global community and will be equipping you with the necessary tools to become transformational leaders who will help shape the future of medicine. To the members of the Class of 2024, you are truly the hope of humanity. And we welcome you to the Miller School of Medicine.”
“We are proud of you,” Dean Henri R. Ford told the incoming M.D./M.P.H. students.

Also greeting and welcoming students were Roderick K. King, M.D., M.P.H., senior associate dean for diversity, inclusion, and community engagement and director of the M.D./M.P.H. program, Shirin Shafazand, M.D., M.S., deputy director of the M.D./M.P.H. program, and Duyen Vo, M.S., a third-year medical candidate and executive president of Miller School of Medicine Student Government.

“I reflected back on my own journey when I started medical school and thought about how exciting it was on that first day. There is a mixture of jitters, excitement and nerves, but we are here to help you on that journey,” Dr. King said. “When I say we, I am referring to our dean and faculty, who are all excited to help you become the best physicians in the world.”

“Some of the most amazing leaders come out of the crucible of very challenging times,” Dr. King added. “And we are will excited that you will be the future leaders in medicine to
shape this country, the way that care is delivered and shape the way that public health is integrated into medicine.”

The Class of 2024 consists of 53 students, 17 of whom have a Bachelor of Arts and 36 who have a Bachelor of Sciences from universities across the U.S. and Canada. Their educational backgrounds include anthropology, biology, Latin American studies, neuroscience, and public health.

Besides 77% of the class being non-Florida residents, 73% are women, 40% are minorities, and 25% are under-represented minorities. The average age is 24.5 years.

“I am more excited than ever to start learning about approaches to preventative medicine and addressing the needs of communities as a competent public health physician when disasters, such as COVID, affect the most vulnerable in our population,” said Zachary Donato, who moved to Miami from Denver to begin his journey at the Miller School. “Although I couldn't physically be with my classmates during the orientation, I felt a really strong sense of cohesiveness already between our cohort and the welcome to the Miller School of Medicine was still amazing.”

Mikayla Bowen, who currently lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and will soon move to Miami, also found the orientation to be very helpful.

“Despite being virtual, everyone made sure that it was still a special day for us and not too overwhelming,” Bowen said. “Though it is unfortunate that we cannot begin classes in person, starting public health classes in the midst of an epidemic seems like a unique learning opportunity to
understand epidemiological processes as they are happening on a mass scale in real time.”

During the orientation, Miller School faculty introduced the M.D./M.P.H. curriculum, including information on clinical skills, integration of public health in medical education, assessment and curricular innovation.

Other presentations covered student services, health and wellness, academic enrichment, the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement, policies and student responsibilities, financial assistance and debt management counseling.

After a 15-minute break, current M.D./M.P.H. students convened for a student panel to share their experiences and advice with new students, as well as to answer their questions. The panelists included Jean-Paul Bryant, a fourth-year student, Allison Draper, a third-year student, and second-year students Maya Lubarsky, Sally Moghaddam, Samuel Hinkes and Amanda Nwaba.

“The virtual orientation panel was a unique experience that showed how much we’re all still adapting in this age of COVID-19,” said Nwaba, who is also the president of the Student National Medical Association at the Miller School. “We enjoyed answering the new M.D./M.P.H. cohort’s questions and giving them advice. I had really appreciated having the previous class there for my class, so I’m happy to pay it forward. I’m looking forward to getting to know them all and witnessing what they’re going to bring to the Miller School.”

She and her peers told the newcomers about the importance of
taking care of themselves and each other throughout their journey in medical school. Another topic discussed at length was how to maintain social bonds as a united class during the pandemic.

Students began their public health courses on June 3. A Faculty and Staff Meet and Greet was held by the Department of Public Health Sciences on July 2 from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. A second orientation session will be held on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, August 6-8.