



# Summer Neurosurgery Scholarship Program for Black Medical Students Expands Nationally

Mareshah Sowah took a big step toward a rewarding career in neurosurgery last summer thanks to the Summer Research Scholarship in Neurosurgery for Black Medical Students, offered by the Department of Neurological Surgery at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.



Mareshah Sowah, a past summer scholar

“This program expanded my knowledge, let me scrub with UM residents on surgical procedures, and gave me renewed confidence in my career path,” said Sowah, a second-year medical student at the University of South Carolina. “It will help me turn my dream of becoming a neurosurgeon into reality.”

Four years after its launch at the Miller School, the summer scholarship program is expanding to other leading medical schools across the country nationwide to support additional Black students who want to conduct clinical or research work in neuroscience or neurosurgery.

“Our goal is to provide a pathway for Black medical students to alleviate the racial and ethnic disparities that exist in



the neurosciences and neurosurgery,” said Allan D. Levi, M.D., Ph.D., professor and chairman of neurosurgery, chief of neurosurgery at Jackson Memorial Hospital, and the Robert M. Buck Distinguished Chair in Neurological Surgery. “To our knowledge, this is the first and only program in the country that specifically targets Black medical students who want to be neurosurgeons.”

Last summer, the Department of Neurological Surgery partnered with the neurosurgery departments at Johns Hopkins University and Washington University in St. Louis to select seven medical students for the nine-week program.

Sowah was one of three students at the Miller School who benefited from the customized learning experience. “Participants choose their school, as well as their areas of focus,” said Dr. Levi. “Some spend their time on the clinical side, while others do research. Each student has one or two mentors who provide advice and support for future residencies and fellowships.”

Looking ahead to the summer of 2023, Dr. Levi said the scholarship program will expand to seven neurosurgery departments, with at least 13 medical students. The four additional institutions are NYU Langone Health, University of North Carolina, University of Nebraska, and UCLA.

## Promoting Diversity in Neurosurgery



From left: Wavery Rose Brim, a past summer scholar, assisting on a surgical procedure



The scholarship program was recently featured in the *Journal of Neurosurgery*. Mareshah Sowah and Dr. Levi were the lead and senior authors respectively of the article, "Promoting Diversity in Neurosurgery: A Multi-Institutional Scholarship-Based Approach." Miller School co-authors were Dr. Levi; Stephanie H. Chen, M.D., neurological surgery graduating resident; Barth A. Green, M.D., former chair and professor of neurological surgery and executive dean for global health and community service; Michael E. Ivan, M.D., M.B.S., associate professor of neurological surgery; and Henri R. Ford, M.D., M.H.A., dean and chief academic officer of the Miller School.

The journal article examined the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in neurosurgery and the creation, implementation, and potential impact of the neurosurgery summer scholarship program, along with the next steps for increasing diversity in neurosurgery.

Dr. Levi believes summer scholarship programs play an important role in increasing clinical and research talent diversity in neurosurgery, as well as in other surgical and medical specialties. "We need to welcome more underrepresented minorities into medicine at every stage of the education and training pipeline," he said. "Along with scholarship assistance and practical experience, minority students benefit from having mentors, sponsors, and other role models from similar backgrounds. These types of training programs, like ours, are vital in combating inequality and advancing clinical care and research."

Dr. Levi added that physicians from underrepresented minorities are more likely to care for similar patient populations and perform research to alleviate structural



health inequities. “A diverse workforce also promotes enrichment of thought within academic and community institutions and expands overall cultural competence,” he added.

## Family of Physicians with Roots in Ghana



Krisna Maddy, a past summer scholar at work in the lab

Born in London, Sowah came to the U.S. as a child and now lives in northern Virginia. She has family roots in Ghana, where her grandfather, Dr. Benjamin Edo, was the first neurologist in the African nation; her mother, Dr. Roma Edo-Sowah, is an internist working in northern Virginia.

“My grandfather’s insights into neurosurgery, such as localizing lesions without a CT scan, helped generate my interest in medicine,” Sowah said. “But I had to find my own path, which included a lot of shadowing in pediatric neurosurgery when I was in college.”

After completing undergraduate studies at Cornell University and earning a master’s degree at Duke University, Sowah was accepted at the College of Medicine at the University of South Carolina. “I heard about the UM program on social media, and felt it would be perfect for me,” she said. “I will be forever grateful to the residents and faculty at the Miller School for this great experience.”

To learn more about the program and to apply, please click [here](#).



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