

## UC San Diego School of Medicine Expands Class Size, Launches New Program in Health Disparities

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His path has been long, winding, and many would have given up, but Emerick Gallegos is going to be a doctor. The former high school drop-out from rural Mexicali triumphed over lack of finances and family tragedy to join the incoming Class of 2011 at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine.

For the first time in decades, The UCSD School of Medicine has expanded in class size. Emerick is one of 12 students enrolled in a special new curriculum developed to train physicians interested in caring for populations that are traditionally underserved by the health care system.

The 12 additional students, whose enrollment increases the class size from 122 to 134, have entered a program called "The Program in Medical Education- Health Equity (PRIME-HEq)." The five year, dual-degree program operates under the leadership of Sandra Daley, M.D., assistant dean of diversity and community partnerships and professor, department of pediatrics, UCSD School of Medicine.

"This is a wonderful way to produce better health for all patients," said Maria Savoia, M.D., UCSD School of Medicine vice dean for medical education. "The program is designed to reduce disparities and produce equities for all in healthcare. It's a very inclusive program, serving diverse populations: those who often are not treated equally or who experience disease unequally."

### **PRIME-HEq**

California is projected to face a shortfall of 17,000 physicians (15.9% shortage) by 2015 due to the fact that population growth and the number of aging physicians in the workforce far out weighs the number of students entering medical school.

The Health Equity curriculum aims to increase the number of clinicians, research scientists, and advocates, a diverse community of scholars, who have a deep dedication to addressing minority health and health disparities. The students will spend many hours in community settings, appropriate to their areas of interest, immersed in the day-to-day struggles of the people they hope to serve.

The dual-degree requirement provides an array of possibilities: Masters in Public Health, Masters in Healthcare Leadership, Masters in Advanced Studies in Law and Medicine, or a Masters in Clinical Research.

"Many distinct populations are underserved. Ethnicity, race and income are important components but there are other disparities we don't often specifically address," said Savoia. "For example, the deaf community is traditionally a medically underserved population. So are the developmentally disabled. These populations bring additional challenges to the healthcare system, and we need to offer equal levels of care."

Emerick Gallegos is interested in rural populations, agricultural areas such as the one he grew up in, working side-by-side with his uncles. When Gallegos crosses the stage to receive his white coat, a dozen of his family and friends will be watching.

### **Class of 2011**

The incoming class was selected from a pool of 5,500 applicants for 134 openings. The class has an average undergraduate GPA of 3.75. Eight students have already earned Ph.D.s and 12 have Master's Degrees.

Eight of this year's students have entered the Medical Scientist Training Program (MSTP) to concurrently study toward both an M.D. and Ph.D. One of these students, Leela Davies, will don her white coat, and follow in her parents' footsteps. "They are doctors, a neurosurgeon and a neurologist. There is such potential in genetics and I would love to do something to help find more of the causes behind genetic diseases," said Davies. "I did a workshop in college that showed me I want direct patient interaction. But I want to balance that clinical experience with research. An M.D.-Ph.D. meets that need."

Seven of this year's students come into the school as part of the Medical Scholars Program; the students studied for their undergraduate degrees at UCSD going straight into the medical school. This includes an immigrant whose journey to medical school was not easy or short.

Eight students have Ph.D. degrees in an array of areas: physics, bioengineering, biology, computer science, history of medicine, neurobiology, and neuroscience.

Twelve students already have Master's degrees.

41 different undergraduate campuses are represented, including many students from the UC System. The most represented undergraduate campuses are UCSD (29); UCLA (22); and UC Berkeley (22).

44 students in the entering class were born outside the U.S., representing a variety of countries, from Armenia to New Zealand. As the son of missionaries, SunMin Kim, who was born in Korea and raised in Japan, has traveled the world.

"I like the idea behind the UCSD student-run free-clinics," said Kim. "Missionary service has taken me to Kenya, Haiti, Japan, Sierra Leon and more. I want to continue to serve the poor and under-served."

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