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PHOTOS: Kelsie Sirak, Kanan Patel, Joseph Collier

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS EXPLORE FAMILY MEDICINE AT EXCELA HEALTH

LATROBE, PA, AUGUST 2021... Three aspiring family physicians are the recipients of this year's Andrew D. Bagby Family Medicine Scholarship. Each participated in a month-long program this summer through the Excelsa Health Latrobe Hospital Family Medicine Residency Program in which they will gain inpatient and outpatient experience, in addition to exploring career options in primary care.

The Bagby Scholarship was established by family and friends in memory of first-year resident Dr. Andrew Bagby, who died tragically in November 2001. The scholarship fund has increased substantially in the 18 years the scholarship has been awarded. It is supported by the Bagby family, as well as private donors, to give opportunities to aspiring family medicine physicians. The scholarship is administered by the Latrobe Area Hospital Charitable Foundation. To learn more, visit ExcelsaHealth.org/bagby.

Kelsie Sirak, 22, need look no further for inspiration to pursue a medical career than her sister and brother-in-law, Drs. Courtney and Ryan Floyd, both attending physicians with Excelsa Health as well as graduates of Excelsa's residency program. Admittedly, the New Jersey native entertained the idea of pursuing studies in veterinary medicine while in high school. As a student at the College of William and Mary, she

continued to explore her options, but grew increasingly drawn to family medicine as her relatives shared their experiences with patients. Now enrolled in the Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, she is even more enamored of primary care, having benefited from shadowing experiences with a number of physicians. Those opportunities affirm that she will have flexibility and variety in her own practice one day.

“The most important thing I’ve learned is to truly connect with patients and understand them as a whole. I look forward to being able to take the time to talk with each patient and learn their full story. A family physician is more than a just a wealth of information; they’re connected on a more personal level. I want to be the reliable resource and friend when families face difficult situations. Physicians are more than just the person to see when you’re sick; they are part of a community.”

At 28, Joseph Collier has had more opportunities to interact with physician specialists than some of his classmates. During his undergraduate career at the University of Washington pursuing a degree in biology, his family learned that their daughter, now 3, had a significant health condition that began when she was in utero. During the pregnancy, Collier and his wife, Melissa, were faced with the real possibility that their child would not survive, much less thrive after delivery. Through the many difficult decisions that they had to make that would impact this young life, they were supported and encouraged by their pediatrician, who Collier sees as a role model in pursuing a career in primary care.

“So many families are navigating the difficult roads of disease and treatment. Practicing in family medicine, I will be able to provide them with a map; I can walk with them, reassure them and illuminate where and with whom the answers to their questions lie,” Collier explained when asked about his desired specialty. He is now enrolled at Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia.

In addition to welcoming a son, who is nearing age 2, the Washington State native says he continues to learn lessons from other health professionals that he hopes will make him a better doctor someday. He has an equally high regard for nurses, for

example, and he trained and worked as a certified nursing assistant before beginning medical school. He fondly remembers the colleagues he worked with and the dedication and humor they displayed. “My admiration and respect for health professionals is immense. I want to bring the same level of support to my future patients that my family has received.”

The COVID-19 public health crisis couldn't be more personal for Kanan Patel, who is a student at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine-Georgia Campus. In January, she began honing her primary care skills by gathering patient health information as a volunteer with the state's COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force, and as part of the Georgia East Metro Medical Reserve Corps. Certified to administer inoculations, she also helped to vaccinate teachers in a particular county. While grateful to celebrate these successes in fighting a worldwide pandemic, she also experienced loss, with her grandfather dying from complications of the COVID virus. From it all, Patel has found family medicine the best amalgam of her interests and her expertise.

Now 25, Patel received her undergraduate degree in health promotion from the University of Georgia. As she considered her next steps, various healthcare disciplines – nursing, physical therapy, public health and medicine – each had some appeal. Time as a lab assistant for the United States Department of Agriculture added more food for thought, but it was the year she spent shadowing a family physician that solidified her career decision.

“I love the concept of growing with my patients,” she said. “I want to develop strong relationships with them and the community. Disease prevention is a fundamental goal for me and I appreciate that I can offer education and resources to my patients to shape their lifestyle choices and healthy aging.”