



Dear Health Mentors,

We would like to express our gratitude for your dedication to Jefferson's students through the Health Mentors Program. Because of you, we've had a great foundation to build upon as we start on our path to become practiced clinicians in various health care fields. You've helped us to appreciate the importance of working as an interprofessional team to provide high-quality, patient-centered care. Your devotion to the program has enabled us to look beyond diagnoses and to better understand what matters most to our patients.

First-year students, who met with you for a second time this spring, developed a deeper understanding of their mentors' lives and the problems that may arise as a result of their chronic health conditions. Working collaboratively with their mentors, teams of students identified specific goals to work on to help improve their mentors' overall health and well-being. Each member of the interprofessional team was challenged to consider what his or her chosen profession could contribute towards the achievement of the mentor's goal. The conversations and interactions that we have had with you led us to consider more deeply how we define "health," as well as what health looks like to each individual. We are grateful for the opportunity to explore these questions with you early in our health careers, and we will carry the lessons you have taught us into our future interactions with patients.

Second-year students in Health Mentors spent the spring semester engaged in discussions about patient-centered care and teamwork. Students chose and participated in learning activities that emphasized the importance of interprofessional education and practice in a variety of different health care settings. Students then wrote reflections about how their perspectives of person-centered care had been altered as a result of participating in the Health Mentors program. We've heard that students and mentors have learned immensely from one another and derived meaning from exploring the different roles of health professionals, critical elements of clinical care, and possibilities for the future of health care and wellness. Next fall, student teams will be learning more about the underlying factors that impact an individual's health, like social and community influences. Stay tuned to receive a letter over the summer highlighting our revised HM curriculum!

We wish you a healthy and fruitful season to come and hope you enjoy the beautiful summer weather. We look forward to working with you again in the fall semester!

Best Wishes,

Iris Chiu, **Occupational Therapy Student**

Couple & Family Therapy Students

Colby Agostinelli

Emily Short

Pharmacy Student

Christina Maher

Medical Students

Daniel Amor

Pavitra Krishnamani

Naveed Rahman

Mike Reynolds

Carly Sokach

Anusha Vemuri

Nursing Students

Jennifer Polo

Daneen Whinna

Physical Therapy Students

Jenna-Marie Lewis

A Healthy Mind + A Healthy Body = A Healthier You

More attention than ever before is being paid to mental health, especially the impact it can have on quality of life both physically and mentally. However, since we cannot see improvement in our brains the way we can see improvement in our physical body, mental and emotional self-care can seem confusing and mysterious. Mental and physical health are connected. Taking care of our minds can help our bodies feel better and vice versa.

Physical Illness and Mental Health

Chronic medical conditions including diabetes or arthritis can take a toll on the physical body. These conditions can also begin to change the way we think and feel. Conditions that require constant monitoring and maintenance can create worries and anxieties. Anxiety can feel like: persistent feelings of unease and worry often accompanied by racing thoughts, faster than usual heartbeat, trouble sleeping, and/or body tension. Anxiety can be physically exhausting because it causes people to constantly think and worry about the future; it keeps the mind from taking a break.

Dealing with chronic illness can bring up other feelings like anger and sadness. It can be frustrating when it seems like our body “betrays us.” This frustration can foster a sense of hopelessness and exhaustion that may become depression. Depression is a persistent sense of sadness and helplessness that can make it difficult to find life enjoyable. Depression can feel like: wanting to cry more often than usual, sleeping more or less than normal, and feeling generally sad and hopeless. These feelings can make it hard to take care of one’s physical body and make physical pain feel worse than before.

Thinking about these strong feelings of worry, anger, and sadness can be overwhelming but there are very simple strategies that can help people deal with these feelings and begin to feel happier and healthier both physically and mentally!

Strategies to Improve Mental Health

Exercise

Finding ways to move our bodies on a regular basis can actually increase energy and positive feelings. Regular exercise produce “feel-good” chemicals in the brain!

Mindfulness

This is a simple meditation practice that helps people stay in tune with the present moment of their lives without worrying about the future or dwelling on the past. Mindfulness encourages positivity and self-compassion.

Talking about it

Sometimes feelings become intense and uncomfortable when they are left unspoken. Finding a trusted person like family, friends, a doctor, or a therapist to express feelings to, can help relieve painful emotions.

Waking Up to Wellness: A Health Mentor's Perspective

Is it possible to be ill and be well at the same time? Nine years ago, my answer: "Impossible!" First, illness and wellness are contradictory, opposites and scholarly oxymorons. Second, no doctor who knew me a total of an hour was going to tell me I was sick. I'd show him and "it." I would fight like a girl. I'd beat it. De-Nile, it really is more than a river in Africa.

At 36 I became a clichéd disease tag-line. Once I even wore a red cape and delivered a "Superhero" speech to 300 sweaty cyclists. It was 1963 all over again: I was young, and I loved being young; I was free, and I loved being free; and I was living my life—not my disease. However, all "good things" must come to an end, and I was transitioning from cliché to idiom.

Six years into my diagnosis the idiom fell, and this time I couldn't get up. I tried, over and over. I was Pollyanna wrapped in Leslie Gore's famous lyrics with the "sass" my nieces taught me, yet the MonSter was #winning! And then, one evening I finally lost my grip. I fell, landed, hard darkness surrounding me and nothing but a pinhole of light above me. As I held my pity party that day, it was the two of us, me still smarting from the landing and the MonSter, heckling and mocking me. I did what any self-respecting strong person would do: I cried, oceans of tears. I was worn out, beaten up and now dehydrated. It was time to find water. It was time to accept. It was time to find wellness in illness.

At first I was a "doubting Thomas." Really, what was the point? I was still sick. There would still be medications with nasty side-effects, tests, devices, complications and bad stuff. Nothing had changed, but that was the problem. I had spent so much time trying to hold onto life before my illness that I had forgotten to live the present life I had *with* my illness. We could coexist cordially, the MonSter and me. Even my neurologist said it was possible that people with the MonSter could live a good quality of life. I believed him, however, I never really listened or understood what he meant until I finally reconciled with the MonSter. I embraced "it." I let it have its voice; I just made sure mine was louder.

Today, I am well, my *version of well*. The key for me was letting go, and then re-discovering me, my physical, social, mental, occupational and spiritual self, with a chronic, progressive, incurable illness. Easy? No way. Worth it? Absolutely. It is amazing how suffering produces greatness. I'll close with a saying that is embraced by my soon-to-be alma mater: "Be who you are and be that well." – St. Francis of DeSales

In good health – Dina Fonzone

And a special shout out to my TJU Health Mentor Team – and Teams – over the years. You all have inspired me to be better, to be who I am and to be that well in spite of being ill. For this I am eternally appreciative and grateful.

What Our Health Mentors Say About the Program

"The medical events I experienced 4 years ago changed my life, and since then it has been my passion/mission to share my story with medical providers in the hope that this may help someone else avoid going through what I did. [Through the Health Mentors Program], I have a great group of students that I'm working with. They have been very helpful to me, and I appreciate a great deal knowing there is a group of professional students willing to take a genuine interest in me. [Being] connected to this great group of students means the world to me because it gives me an avenue to share my story and help those learning to become medical providers." -Janet Yost

What Our Students Say About the Program

“The health mentors program was a great tool to get a feel for what my role as an OT was in a multidisciplinary group as well as making some new friends”

— *Kassandra Beckage, 2nd year OT student*

“As a second year, we got to have a home visit with our health mentors which was a great way to get to know them and make a much more personal experience. I am looking forward to more longitudinal patient care in my future.”

— *Jacob Reiss, 2nd year Medical student*

“My favorite part of the program was building a relationship with the mentor.”

— *Hemandeep Dhami, 2nd year Medical student*

“I found the health mentors program invaluable in gaining insight into the particular strengths and contributions of a variety of health professionals. The opportunity to function as a part of a diverse health care team was a great exercise.”

— *Christine Barlow, 2nd year Pharmacy student*

“The best part for me was making friends outside of the medical field and getting to know what other professional schools are learning and what their educational experiences have been like. I think it’s a good way to build respect and understanding for the other professions.”

— *Sonia Sethi, 1st year Medical student*

Know a Potential Health Mentor?

If you know anyone who enjoys sharing their personal health experiences, please ask them to connect with us! Health Mentors are at least 18 years of age and living with chronic conditions or impairments (high blood pressure, asthma, arthritis, heart disease, multiple sclerosis, blindness, etc.).

For more information: call 215-955-8601 or email Sarah.Dallas@jefferson.edu or visit our website www.jefferson.edu/health-mentor

Spring Student Learning: A Look at the Interprofessional Geriatric Clinical Skills Fair

