

# AUA ALUMN

MAGAZINE

ISSUE 07 | 2024



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2004 - 2024

A N N I V E R S A R Y

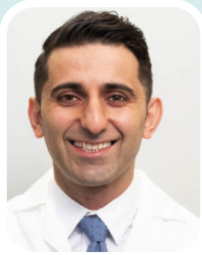


# MILESTONES IN MEDICINE

## Doctors Reflect On Their AUA Journey



**Dr. Ehsan Esmaeili**  
Surgeon,  
Orthopaedic  
Hand Surgery  
Class 2007  
Florida



**Dr. Radmehr Torabi**  
Endovascular  
Neurosurgeon,  
Brown University  
Class 2009  
Rhode Island



**Dr. Vincent Gallo**  
Vascular &  
Interventional  
Radiology, Staten  
Island University  
Hospital  
Class 2009  
Staten Island

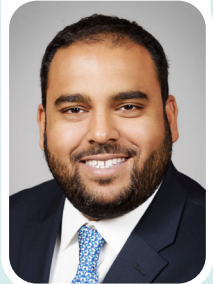


**Dr. Jasmine Marcelin**  
Assistant Professor,  
Infectious Diseases,  
UNMC  
Class 2011  
Nebraska



**Dr. Alberto Marcelin**  
Assistant Dean of  
Admissions,  
UNMC  
Class 2011  
Nebraska

**Dr. Alok Ezhuthachan**  
Attending  
Physician,  
Northside Hospital  
Class 2012  
Georgia



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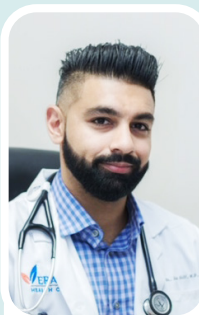
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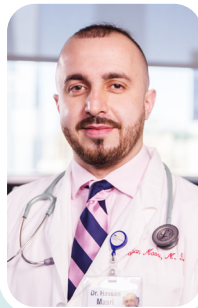


**Dr. Adam Isacoff**  
Associate Medical  
Director, Palm  
Beach Childrens  
Hospital  
Class 2009  
Kentucky



**Dr. Jasdeep Gill**  
Medical Director,  
Vera Life  
Class 2009  
Surrey, BC

**Dr. Hassan Masri**  
Director of  
Medicine,  
Windsor Hospital  
Class 2010  
Ontario, CN



**Dr. Ashley Kanjira**  
Attending  
Physician,  
Northside Hospital  
Class 2012  
Georgia

**Dr. Monique Leung**  
Premier Womens  
Health,  
Hawaii  
Class 2013  
Hawaii







**Dr. Jasmine Sawhne**  
Psychiatrist,  
Private Practice,  
Class 2013  
California



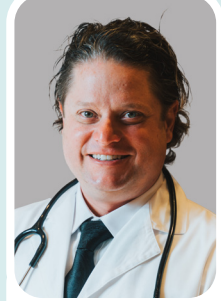
**Dr. Rajat Chand**  
Adult and  
Pediatric Vascular  
/Interventional  
Radiologist,  
University of  
North Carolina  
Class 2016  
North Carolina



**Dr. Ruby Sangha**  
Fellow,  
Pediatric Infectious  
Disease  
Class 2019  
Pittsburgh



**Dr. George Bchech**  
Fellow,  
Pediatric Infectious  
Disease  
Class 2019  
Pittsburgh



**Dr. Byron Blanchard**  
Resident, Emergency  
Medicine, University  
of Rochester  
Class 2023  
New York

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**Dr. Raaj Ruparel**  
Surgeon,  
Mayo Clinic  
Class 2014  
Minnesota



**Dr. Pedro Torres**  
Emergency  
Medicine/ Surgical  
Critical Care,  
Carondelet Health  
Class 2015  
Arizona



**Dr. Dawn Roach**  
Fellow,  
Infectious Diseases,  
Mayo Clinic  
Class 2017  
Florida

**Dr. Noelle Byrne**  
Resident,  
Obstetrics and  
Gynaecology  
Class 2021  
New York



**Dr. Hadi Rezaei**  
Resident,  
Surgery,  
Mayo Clinic  
Class 2022  
Minnesota





## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

### Dear Alumni

**I**t is my pleasure to introduce this issue of the AUA Alumni Magazine. It is gratifying to see our graduates, who come from diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds, as competent and compassionate physicians, which clearly shines through each and every experience shared in this magazine. The articles showcase our alumni working at the forefront of the accelerated transition of medical practice and innovations in medical technology, an effect of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. We read about the rise in telemedicine practice in fields such as gastroenterology and the practice of ultrasound in the Pediatric ER. Browsing through this publication you'll note one constant: no matter the situation, we see AUA alumni tirelessly confronting the challenges medicine has presented head-on.

Our alumni are shaping the field of medicine, becoming chief residents, earning significant awards, and obtaining competitive fellowships. Every article in this magazine reinforces AUA's academic strength and commitment to its mission to ensure that AUA graduates develop the skills and attitudes of lifelong learning, compassion, and professionalism. Each story shared here is a testament to the success of our graduates, reflecting their dedication

and resiliency throughout the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

Success is multi-fold – past, current, and future – and as we move forward, we must not forget to value our past – our pillars of strength – our distinguished faculty. That is why it is with a heavy heart that I want to acknowledge the loss of two esteemed members of the AUA family, Dr. Alvin Noam Eden, Dr. Steven Glasser, and Dr. Sam LeBaron. Dr. Eden, our Clinical Co-Chair of Pediatrics, taught, supervised, and mentored hundreds of students in clinical rotations and residents in training. He will be remembered as a Doctor's Doctor par excellence. Dr. Glasser, Professor of Neuroscience, joined when AUA opened its doors. He was respected and loved by many for sharing his time and knowledge. Dr. LeBaron, AUA's former Executive Dean, Preclinical Sciences, was committed to improving the education of medical students while stressing the importance of service to patients.

In closing, I want to thank those who have contributed to this issue of the Alumni Magazine and wish our alumni continued success in advancing medicine and patient care and leading the way forward through technology, innovation, and compassion for their patients.

Sincerely yours,  
**Neal S. Simon**





## DEAR AUA ALUMNI



On behalf of the AUA Alumni Association, I would like to express my gratitude and give a well-deserved shout-out to our alumni for their continuous dedication and support, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a moment of reflection over

the recent years, it is evident that the pandemic had a profound effect on healthcare globally, pushing the boundaries of the practice of medicine. At the same time, however, it is truly amazing to see our alumni rise to the challenge, being forced to not only think outside of the box but take on more responsibilities without skipping a beat.

Many of our alumni saw the surge in innovation that accompanied the change in the healthcare landscape post-COVID and are now ready to carry it forward. AUA's long-term commitment to innovation in medicine has helped its graduates face the challenges, remain

steadfast, and thrive in their medical careers.

This directly reflects the quality of education they received at AUA. Alumni play a very important role in showing our prospective and current students what can be achieved with strong academics, determination, and support.



*No matter where  
you are in life, I wish  
you much success  
and urge you to stay  
connected with your  
origin – AUA – let's  
keep the legacy going!*



For this, I am truly grateful and appreciate the ongoing alumni participation in AUA activities. I am very happy to see our AUA family grow and prosper.

Since there are many facets through which you can support your alma mater, I am more than happy to discuss your commitments individually; so, please feel free to reach out to me. You're also welcome to participate or interact online at [auaalumni.org](http://auaalumni.org).

Warm regards,  
**Par Prem Kumar**  
Advisor to the President for  
Special Projects  
(347) 268-4723  
[Pkumar@auamed.org](mailto:Pkumar@auamed.org)

## Dr. Ehsan Esmaeili: Offering That Helping Hand



obtaining residencies. So they really bent over backward to get us where we needed to be.”

His fond memories of AUA include his friendships with faculty and administrators. “Dr. Steven Glasser was a wonderful professor—very memorable, excellent teacher. Just an all-around great guy,” he said. He also spoke highly of Bob Gelles, an administrator who helped establish the alumni relations program and whom he stayed in touch with for many years, describing him as a “really nice guy.”

Today, Dr. Esmaeili’s specialty is orthopedics, hand and upper extremity. However, he initially focused in cardiothoracic surgery where he did a general surgery residency at Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System in South Carolina. “Midway through my residency, I started doing a lot of hands in upper extremity with local attendings. And I really enjoyed the anatomy and the complexity of the hand. And so after that, I decided that’s the route I wanted to take,” he explained. He went on to serve as chief resident.

Following residency, Dr. Esmaeili completed a prestigious Hand and Microvascular Surgery fellowship at the University of Connecticut in

...““...  
[AUA has] developed  
a history of  
placing students  
at good residency  
programs...”

**Dr. Ehsan Esmaeili**  
**Class of 2007**

Surgeon:  
Orthopaedic  
Hand Surgery,  
Florida

**DR. EHSAN ESMAEILI  
TOOK A CHANCE AT AUA  
IN ITS EARLIEST YEARS  
BY TRANSFERRING FROM  
ANOTHER SCHOOL.**

The reason was simple: “I saw Neal Simon’s vision, and I knew the faculty at AUA, and it was something I wanted to be part of,” he said.

He joined AUA towards the clinical stages. One of his most memorable experiences was being at a new rotation almost every month, “That in itself was a different experience. They really helped us do rotations at places where we had an interest in



2013. To further expand his surgical education, Dr. Esmaeili also gained certification in microsurgery from Columbia University in New York. During his career, Dr. Esmaeili has published and presented his research at local and national meetings, including the American Society for Surgery of the Hand and the New England Hand Society. Dr. Esmaeili is affiliated with Boca Raton Regional Hospital,

Boca Raton Outpatient Surgery and Laser Center, and Bethesda Outpatient Surgery Center. With all that he's accomplished, AUA continues to hold a special place with Dr. Esmaeili. "They've done a phenomenal job to date. Certainly, they have developed a history of placing students at good residency programs, and I think Mr. Simon is seeing his dream being fulfilled," he said.

...““...

They've done a phenomenal job to date. Certainly, they have developed a history of placing students at good residency programs, and I think Mr. Simon is seeing his dream being fulfilled."

.....

### Dr. Ehsan Esmaeili Class of 2007

Surgeon:  
Orthopaedic  
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Florida

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... “ “ ...

Build meaningful relationships with mentors along the way and don't be shy to ask questions.”

Dr. Jasdeep Gill  
Class of 2009

Medical Director,  
Vera Life,  
Surrey, BC

## Dr. Jasdeep Gill: The Prodigal who Returned



THIS WAS ONE CANADIAN WHO TRAVELED TO AUA TO STUDY MEDICINE AND THEN HEADED BACK HOME TO DO A PRESTIGIOUS RESIDENCY

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO.

According to Dr. Jasdeep Gill, walking into a top-tier Canadian residency program like U of T stirred feelings in him of impostor syndrome.

To address this, Dr. Gill relied on the intensive rotation experiences at AUA, working alongside residents, fellows, and staff physicians from various academic institutions. Dr. Gill says he has overcome doubts that he belongs in the ranks of esteemed medical professionals.

“My experience during my clinical rotations more than prepared me for what was ahead,” he says. “Of course,



at that moment, I did not realize this. Like everyone, I had massive butterflies jabbing me in my stomach.”

Dr. Gill went on to become chief resident at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto. He still emphasizes the importance of being approachable and connected, qualities nurtured at AUA.

“AUA’s small community at the time helped us develop these close and meaningful relationships,” Dr. Gill says. These connections, both with peers and faculty, laid the foundation for his leadership roles.

Dr. Gill’s current practice spans both emergency and family medicine. His versatility is a testament to the

expertise fostered by AUA. “Rotating through different specialties, at different sites, helped me to develop a sense of balance,” Dr. Gill says. “Although these specialties are very different, practicing both has been complementary.”

Dr. Gill now also serves on the faculty of the University of British Columbia. Asked his advice for medical students, he stresses the importance of passion, mentorship, and self-care. “Build meaningful relationships with mentors along the way and don’t be shy to ask questions,” Dr. Gill says. Furthermore, he urged students to prioritize their physical and mental well-being, recognizing that a fulfilling career in medicine requires balance and self-awareness.



...““..."

My intense rotation experience working alongside residents, fellows, and staff physicians of many academic institutions, where AUA has affiliations, instilled the knowledge that helped me further develop my confidence.”

.....

**Dr. Jasdeep Gill**  
**Class of 2009**

Medical Director,  
Vera Life,  
Surrey, BC

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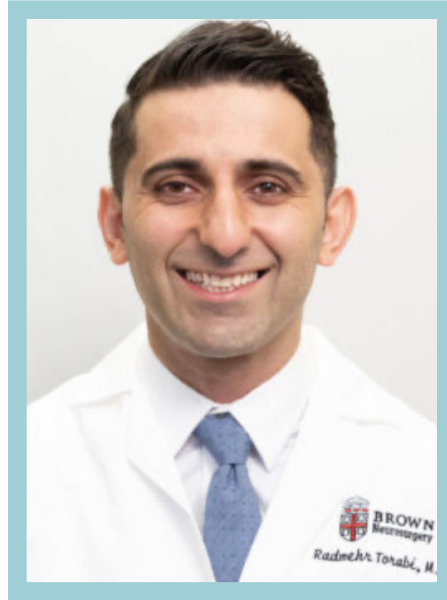
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# Dr. Radmehr Torabi: Putting Patients First

...““...““...

That’s the most satisfying part—seeing a patient make rapid improvements.”



**A PATIENT WAS BROUGHT TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM WITH STROKE SYMPTOMS AND A CLOT IN ONE OF THE MAJOR ARTERIES TO THE BRAIN.**

Luckily, Dr. Radmehr Torabi, a neurosurgeon, was there to help. When he reassessed the patient after the procedure was over, they were able to say their name and move the side of their body they weren’t able to just an hour ago.

“That’s the most satisfying part—seeing a patient make rapid improvements,” said Dr. Torabi. This type of scenario is part of what led him to specialize in neurosurgery.

He enjoyed doing a neurosurgery rotation as a student at AUA and described being on the edge of his seat during the vascular neurosurgery cases. He found that he was excited to go to work and loved how the field was rapidly evolving, especially as it became minimally invasive.

Not only did he get a quality education, but he was also able to build a strong support network. As a young school, AUA had about 150 students on campus in Antigua. Dr. Torabi and his then-roommate, now close friend, decided to throw a summer bash and invited the whole school. To their delight, everyone came and had a great time, “it was just this awesome feeling of community,” he reminisced.

After Dr. Torabi graduated from AUA and entered his first year as a neurosurgeon, he faced a tough case: a comatose 12-year-old girl. She had a ruptured vascular malformation that required multiple surgeries and procedures, which were successful. After completing rehab, the young girl and her mother visited Dr. Torabi, and they were filled with gratitude. They gifted him handmade scarves, a card, and a picture, and they happily shared that she was ready to return to school.

**Dr. Radmehr Torabi  
Class of 2009**

**Endovascular Neuro  
Surgeon,  
Brown University,  
Rhode island**

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He still has those gifts and says their kindness still motivates him.

He explained that wins like this helped fuel him to keep going. Today, he is the Co-director of the Comprehensive Stroke Center and of Endovascular Neurosurgery, both at Rhode Island Hospital, one of the

busiest stroke centers in the country. Through his success, Dr. Torabi looks back at AUA with pride, “When I started, AUA only had two classrooms, a library, and an anatomy lab. The school itself has grown so much and it shows the dedication that this institution has in training folks to be successful.”

...““...

I started when AUA only had two classrooms, a library, and an anatomy lab.

The school itself has grown so much and it shows the dedication that this institution has in training folks to be successful.”

.....

**Dr. Radmehr Torabi**  
**Class of 2009**

Endovascular Neuro  
Surgeon,  
Brown University,  
Rhode island

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## Dr. Vincent Gallo: Prepped for Perfection

...““...““...

Having these  
three specialties  
(internal medicine,  
interventional  
radiology, and  
diagnostic radiology)  
ultimately makes  
you into this super  
doctor.”

.....

### Dr. Vincent Gallo Class of 2009

Vascular & Interventional  
Radiology, Staten Island  
University Hospital,  
Staten Island



**BEFORE ENTERING HIS FIRST  
CADAVER LAB AS A STUDENT,  
DR. VINCENT GALLO HAD  
SERIOUS NERVES. HE WASN'T  
SURE HOW HE WOULD  
REACT TO WHAT HE WAS  
ABOUT TO SEE.**

To his relief, AUA faculty and administration helped create a comfortable learning environment by keeping it professional and educational, not emotional. Dr. Gallo says that he learned a lot that day and appreciated the professionalism of AUA staff.

His decision to study at AUA was relatively easy. The beauty of Antigua, AUA's core values, and the opportunity to connect with its students and teachers made it a perfect fit.

But, choosing his specialty was “a little convoluted and complex.” Unsure of what he wanted to do initially, he always kept an open mind during his rotations. At the time, he liked several different specialties, including internal medicine. Ultimately, he knew he wanted a specialty that allowed a lot of patient interaction and minimally invasive procedures.

So, he went on to complete an internal medicine residency at SUNY Downstate and participated in a program there called the “direct pathway”, an accelerated fellowship that combined diagnostic radiology and interventional radiology training. During his residency, he was named resident of the year by his peers.

Dr. Gallo had found his calling. Today, he is board-certified in New York and practicing in internal medicine, interventional radiology, and diagnostic radiology. “Having these three specialties ultimately makes you into this super doctor. So you can really apply all these different aspects of your training to taking the best care possible



of your patient,” he shared.

He was recently named the Section Chief of Vascular and Interventional Radiology at Staten Island University Hospital. He has also been a Principal Investigator in many clinical trials, one of which was recently published in The New England Journal of Medicine.

Additionally, Dr. Gallo is a professor, teaching the next generation of medical professionals. One piece of

wisdom he shared with students is that medical school and residencies are hard because they’re supposed to be. It’s preparation to take care of other lives, so “don’t get discouraged and take every day as a learning opportunity.”

Since graduating from AUA, Dr. Gallo has clearly achieved so much. Through all his success, he still credits the university for giving him the foundation he needed and the friends who are now his family.

...““... ..

Don’t get discouraged and take every day as a learning opportunity.”

.....

## Dr. Vincent Gallo Class of 2009

Vascular & Interventional Radiology, Staten Island University Hospital, Staten Island

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## Dr. Adam Isacoff: All for the Kids



... “ “ ...

He really helped make neuroanatomy more understandable and helped with our Step 1 questions.”

• • • • •

**Dr. Adam Isacoff**  
**Class of 2009**

Associate Medical Director, Palm Beach Childrens Hospital, Kentucky

**IT WAS AUA'S STRONG CONNECTION TO NEW YORK THAT FIRST DREW DR. ADAM ISACOFF IN 2005. THAT, AND ITS STRONG CURRICULUM.**

When he started studying there, AUA was still a young institution. He was impressed with the structured approach and small class sizes that allowed for more personalized interactions with the faculty. He also liked how AUA students engaged with the local community and hospital system.

While on campus, Dr. Isacoff developed strong friendships with his roommates and other students. He enjoyed spending time with his colleagues and the staff. The fun experiences and pranks further enriched this sense of community. Everyone was approachable, even the school's administration. Dr. Isacoff remembers joking around with Dr. Bell and some of the students dressing like him one day.

So, how did Dr. Bell react when he walked into his office?

“He half smiled, so we knew he was slightly amused...,” Dr. Isacoff says.

Dr. Isacoff fondly remembers another AUA professor, Dr. Glasser.

“He really helped make neuroanatomy more understandable and helped with our Step 1 questions,” Dr. Isacoff says. “I’m really sad to hear that he passed... He was really influential among AUA students.”

Inspired by such mentors, Dr. Isacoff found a specialty he loved: pediatric emergency medicine.

It has led him to various roles, including a Pediatrics Residency at Saint Peter’s University Hospital and a Fellowship in Pediatric Emergency Medicine at The University of Louisville. He also served as the Section Chief of Pediatric Emergency Services at Palm Beach Children’s Hospital in West Palm Beach, Florida, from 2015 to 2020.

As of 2020, he is the Associate Medical Director of the Pediatric Emergency Department at Norton Children’s Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky, and an Associate Professor of Pediatrics for The University of Louisville School of Medicine.

He has obtained his Master’s in Clinical Science Investigation and a Master’s in Business Administration from The University of Louisville.

# Dr. Hassan Masri: Captivated by Excellence

WHEN HE FIRST HEARD OF AUA, HASSAN MASRI WAS BLOWN AWAY BY THE TOP-TIER FACULTY.

“The faculty came from very distinguished places in the United States and Canada, and had an excellent reputation and track record,” says the 2010 alumnus. “These people were putting their reputation on the line and they taught at AUA!”

The distinguished faculty he remembers included luminaries like Dr. Steve Glasser and Dr. Sanii. As Dr. Masri stepped onto the sun-drenched campus for the first time, a wave of anticipation mingled with uncertainty washed over him. He was led straight into the anatomy lab, a stark reminder of the transformative journey ahead. “The anxiety that I was feeling quickly settled when we went straight to business,” he says. “The weather in Antigua is better than Canada but the classes are the same and everything pretty quickly felt really ordinary.”

Reflecting on his academic journey, Dr. Masri extends his gratitude to the mentors who shaped his trajectory, from Dr. Sanii, a stalwart still guiding students, to the late Dr. Glasser, whose legacy continues to inspire.



“They went from being my professors and teachers to mentors and colleagues, people who I kept in touch with for a long time after I left,” he says.

Dr. Masri emphasizes the importance of self-belief and perseverance. Acknowledging the challenges of studying abroad, he says “AUA provided the tools for success, both on and off the island”. As he put it, “One of the biggest lessons I learned is that when you move from a different country it seems like a very high mountain. The only obstacle in your way to success is yourself.”

Life on the island also fostered a sense of community and camaraderie, and students became family. From beach outings to spirited volleyball and soccer tournaments, the bonds forged on Antiguan shores endured as lifelong friendships.

...““...

When you move from a different country it seems like a very high mountain. The only obstacle in your way to success is yourself.”

.....

**Dr. Hassan Masri**  
**Class of 2010**

Director of Medicine,  
Windsor Hospital,  
Ontario, Canada



...““...““...

We celebrate  
each other's wins  
and actively seek  
opportunities to help  
each other grow.  
We are best friends  
and we also coach  
each other through  
difficult decisions.”

**Dr. Jasmine  
Marcelin**  
**Class of 2011**

Assistant Professor,  
Infectious Diseases, UNMC  
Nebraska

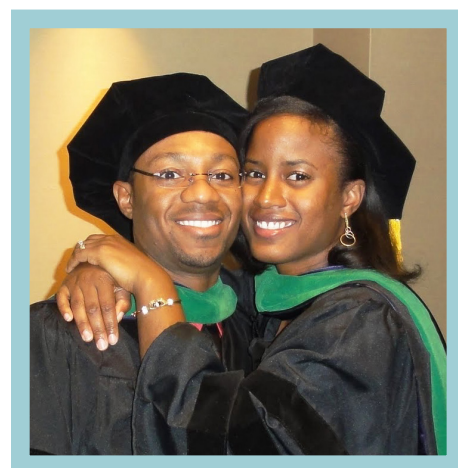
## Dr. Jasmine Marcelin & Dr. Alberto Marcelin: Married to the Job, and Each Other

DR. JASMINE AND  
DR. ALBERTO MARCELIN'S  
JOURNEY FROM CLASSMATES  
TO LIFE PARTNERS BEGAN IN  
THE LABS OF THE AMERICAN  
UNIVERSITY OF ANTIGUA.

It has taken them from the  
sun-drenched shores of Antigua to  
various medical institutions in the  
United States.

“We met in our first semester of  
medical school,” Dr. Jasmine says.  
“We had the same anatomy lab class,  
and our donor tables were opposite  
from each other. We became fast  
friends and, eventually, study partners.  
We were inseparable in medical  
school, and have been ever since.”

“After finishing our basic science in  
Antigua, we got married in Florida  
and then moved to Atlanta for  
our first few clinical rotations,” Dr.  
Alberto recounts. “We completed the  
majority of our clinical rotations in  
Staten Island's Richmond University  
Medical Center. We did a couple of  
away rotations, too. Jasmine went to  
Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota,  
for an infectious diseases rotation,  
and I went to AnMed Health in



Anderson, South Carolina, for a  
family medicine rotation and had the  
opportunity to visit my home country  
Haiti for a mission trip.”

Despite being apart during residency  
matching, they came together  
in a residency program at the  
University of Minnesota. Their  
professional paths again diverged,  
with Dr. Alberto specializing in family  
medicine and Dr. Jasmine carving  
out a niche in infectious diseases and  
medical leadership.

“From the earliest days, we have  
supported each other in our academic  
and clinical pursuits,” Dr. Jasmine says.  
“As a busy two-physician household,  
we have had to be creative to ensure





we prioritize not only our individual careers but also the success and well-being of our children.”

Their collaborative spirit extends beyond their personal lives. They have co-authored a recent publication in a major infectious diseases journal.

“Whatever you do, strive to be the best at it,” Dr. Alberto advises students. “Reach for the stars and don’t let anyone try to tell you that you are not enough, or that you don’t belong.”

Dr. Jasmine, a vocal advocate for equity and inclusion in medicine, underscores the importance of diversity in health care, and the

pivotal role AUA alumni have played in advocating for it. “We all have a role to play in advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion values in healthcare and medicine,” she says. “AUA alumni involved in recruiting and retention of physicians make a difference by advocating for intentional recruiting, unbiased selection processes, and equitable retention initiatives.”

The couple expressed their gratitude for the opportunities they’ve had to impact health care through clinical care, scholarly activity, and medical education leadership. They say they envision a future filled with continued growth, collaboration, and meaningful contributions.



...““..."

Whatever you do  
strive to be the best  
at it. Reach for the  
stars and don’t let  
anyone try to tell  
you that you are not  
enough, or that you  
don’t belong.”

....."

**Dr. Alberto Marcelin**  
**Class of 2011**

Assistant Dean of  
Admissions, UNMC,  
Nebraska

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## Dr. Ashley Kanjira: Journey of Memories



...““...  
Though it seemed  
painful at the time,  
how easy it looks in  
retrospect.”

Dr. Ashley  
Kanjira  
Class of 2012

Attending Physician,  
Northside Hospital,  
Georgia

“MY FONDEST MEMORIES ARE THE BEAUTY OF THE ISLAND, THE FRIENDS I MADE ALONG THE WAY, AND THE RIGOROUS TEACHING SCHEDULE.”

That was Dr. Ashley Kanjira, class of 2012, describing his time at AUA. “I know it’s odd to call that particular one a ‘fond’ memory, but it set the stage for the rest of my journey in medicine,” he says. “Though it seemed painful at the time, how easy it looks in retrospect.”

Dr. Kanjira also met his wife at AUA, the relationship blossoming during his time at the university and influencing his journey in medicine. “In terms of the overall journey, having that connection with her was the safety net that kept us both moving forward to be the doctors we are today.”

Dr. Kanjira has advice for students who get discouraged in their hunt for a medical school to attend. “Take a moment and assess whether or not you really want to do medicine,” he says. “If the answer is truly yes, and it is truly coming from you and what you desire (and not societal pressure), then put your back into the process. Reach out to those who have tread the path already. Don’t discount any avenues to further your education, whether it’s a word put in from doctors

you may know, to a foreign medical school. Never stop working.”

Dr. Kanjira’s career path has led him to the emergency room, a choice influenced by practical considerations and his aptitude for quick decision-making. “To be honest, it was a joint decision between my wife and me,” he says. “Initially, I wanted to do surgery as I loved the procedural nature of it, but she flatly told me that it would not be compatible with our relationship (I’m paraphrasing) given the hours I would have to put into it, in residency and post.”

“The bonus is that it is the most ‘jack-of-all-trades’ specialties in medicine and that suits my nature more than most specialties would,” he says. “I think the pressures I faced in the condensed curriculum at AUA forced me to be able to think and process multiple data points quickly as well.”

Still, working in emergency room setting can often be stressful. Being at the front lines during the pandemic tested Dr. Kanjira’s resilience. “Support systems, though plentiful, were often not enough,” he says. “I relied heavily on my family and anything to distract me from the grind. I’m still dealing with the toll it took, both physically and psychologically, but I’m thankful to be here.”

# Dr. Alok Ezhuthachan: Finding His Calling

**A CRUCIAL TURNING POINT IN HIS COLLEGE JOURNEY OCCURRED WHEN DR. ALOK EZHUTHACHAN MADE THE DECISION TO PURSUE MEDICINE, PROMPTING HIM TO INVESTIGATE DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL AVENUES.**

The decision to apply to AUA was influenced by factors such as the institution's association with renowned medical colleges like Kasturba Medical College in Manipal, India.

Dr. Ezhuthachan recalls, reflecting on the decisive moment that guided him to the Antigua shores. "I evaluated different schools, but one that caught my attention was AUA. The institution was highly regarded," he continues, citing the reason he opted and applied to AUA.

Graduating in 2012 was a bittersweet moment for Dr. Ezhuthachan, his excitement tempered by nervousness. "I had worked very hard at AUA," he says.

"It was the first time I had lived so far from home and so independently," he says, describing the initial nervousness that gave way to independence. "The school was very supportive."

Dr. Ezhuthachan describes the friendships forged during late-night

study sessions. "The connections I made there were memorable," he says, recalling moments of celebration amidst the challenges of medical school. The late-night cram sessions called for some much-needed fuel. "In the middle of the night, we would drive to Casanova's and get shawarmas," he says with a chuckle.

As AUA celebrates its 20th anniversary, Dr. Ezhuthachan offers words of wisdom to current and future students. "Staying focused and positive will help you," he advises, encouraging students to embrace diverse experiences to uncover their passions. Reflecting on his own journey, he acknowledges the importance of open-mindedness in finding one's true calling.

In expressing his gratitude, Dr. Ezhuthachan remembers the supportive faculty and staff at AUA. "I remember Doctor Peter Bell, he was the Dean but very supportive," he acknowledges, highlighting the impact of mentorship which is always available at AUA.

He also fondly recalls the woman who made chicken burgers and snacks, a reminder of the warmth and camaraderie that defined his AUA experience. "Sometimes I still think about those," he reminisces.



... “ “ ...

The school was very  
supportive...the  
connections  
I made there were  
memorable.”

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**Dr. Alok  
Ezhuthachan  
Class of 2012**

**Attending Physician,  
Northside Hospital,  
Georgia**

2023

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## Dr. Monique Leung: Leading by Example



... 66 ...

[AUA] taught me  
how important it was  
to be self-disciplined  
and independent.”

**Dr. Monique Leung**  
**Class of 2013**

Private Physician,  
Premier Womens Health,  
Honolulu



**“I HAD ALWAYS WANTED TO  
STUDY ABROAD,” SAYS  
DR. MONIQUE LEUNG.**

“I learned about AUA when they came to my college.” So when she met recruiters at Bucknell University, a liberal arts college in rural Pennsylvania, she was more than ready for some adventure. “After learning more about AUA, I felt this was the best opportunity to go abroad and study medicine,” she says.

Dr. Leung says AUA gave her more than a degree.

“They taught me how important

it was to be self-disciplined and independent,” she says, expressing particular thanks to the teaching assistants who helped her learn different techniques involved in learning.

She herself found working as a teaching assistant rewarding especially “when students came to me after my sessions and shared their relief when they finally understood the topic.”

Dr. Leung says she is thankful to many others who supported her journey, including Dr. Bharati Balachandran, AUA’s associate dean of faculty affairs, and the Education Enhancement Program. Upon graduating valedictorian, Dr. Leung set her sights on a specialized field.

“Minimally invasive gynecology is a great surgical technique and allows patients to return to their normal daily function quickly,” she says. But there were more challenges there.

“Learning laparoscopy and robotics was challenging because instead of your hands, you are using instruments to surgically cut and suture,” she says. “The most challenging part is when you encounter complications like bleeding, organ injury, or when a mass is very large. But being able



to still accomplish the surgery laparoscopically is most rewarding,” she adds.

Dr. Leung wants to play a role in shaping the next generation of physicians.

“My goal in medical education is to guide other physicians to be

their very best, both academically and clinically,” she says. “I want to challenge their scope of knowledge, to open them up to new possibilities and answers to problems.”

As far as advice for students goes, Dr. Leung says, “Be confident, know yourself, be positive, lead by example. Balance is key.”

... “ “ ...

Be confident,  
know yourself, be  
positive, lead by  
example. Balance is  
key.”

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### Dr. Monique Leung Class of 2013

Private Physician,  
Premier Womens Health,  
Honolulu

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# AUA Milestones

- AUA College of Medicine is founded with an inaugural class of nine students.

- AUA becomes one of a few international medical schools to receive New York State Education Department (NYSED) approval for clinical clerkships and residency training in that state.
- The first White Coat Ceremony welcomes 65 students into the preclinical program.

- Manipal University and AUA unite: their unique partnership ensures that AUA will provide opportunities in global medical education and research.
- Students hold the first Freedom Fest at AUA, celebrating diversity in medical education and raising thousands of dollars for local charities.

- New campus opens with a multistory library, high-speed Wi-Fi, high-tech labs, and more, making it the most modern campus in the Caribbean.
- Harvey®, the most advanced cardiopulmonary patient simulator, is installed in the high-tech clinical skills lab, augmenting the clinical experience of AUA students.
- AUA graduates its first official class of entering students – a total of more than 100 new physicians.

- AUA is fully accredited by the Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Education in Medicine and Other Health Professions (CAAM-HP). Gaining accreditation by CAAM-HP involved a demanding review process that assessed every facet of AUA's medical program.
- AUA is licensed to offer clinical clerkships in Florida by the Commission for Independent Education of the Florida Department of Education (DOE).



- Center for Tropical Diseases established within the University to research and fight infectious diseases in developing countries; receives grant from British High Commission.

- AUA breaks ground on construction of its 17-acre, state-of-the-art campus.
- Mayo Clinic teams with AUA College of Medicine to establish the first Emergency Medical Training Center in the Caribbean.
- The prime minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh; the prime minister of Antigua, the Honorable Baldwin Spencer, and AUA President Neal Simon, all meet in New Delhi. Prime Minister Singh voices his support of AUA, Kasturba Medical College, and global medical education.

- Mount St. John's Medical Centre and AUA form an affiliation, giving students early hands-on clinical experience.
- The U.S. Naval Ship Comfort arrives in Antigua and teams up with AUA faculty and students to provide training and care as part of its four-month humanitarian and civic assistance mission in the Caribbean.

- AUA is provisionally accredited by CAAM-HP.
- AUA hosts the first annual Women's Health Day on campus.



- AUA is approved to participate in the United States Department of Education's Federal Direct Loan Program.
- AUA is recognized by the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI) as the leader in international medical education – the only medical school to receive this “preferred” status and recognition.

- AUA initiates Curriculum Next, a U.S.-modeled curriculum that focuses on small-group active learning, maintains a student to faculty ratio of 10:1 in academic period one and caps large group instruction at 80 students. It emphasizes team and case-based learning as well as peer-to-peer instruction and is centered around the AUA's small-group learning system.
- AUA's Emergency Medicine Training Center (EMTC) trains more than 150 police officers in Calcutta, India in CPR, bandaging, and procedures for moving accident victims at the 11th annual Global Healthcare Summit, an event organized by the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI).

- AUA collaborates with Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science to create a new pathway for under-represented minorities to attend medical school.
- AUA expands global partnerships with leading medical schools and hospitals in the United Kingdom, in India, signing new agreements with University of Warwick's Medical School, Yeovil District Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, and University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire NHS.

- With students' safety and travel complications in mind, due to the pandemic, AUA continued educating medical students through a Hybrid Curriculum for the Spring and Fall 2021 academic period.
- As a member of the Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH), AUA participates regularly in the annual global health-themed conference.

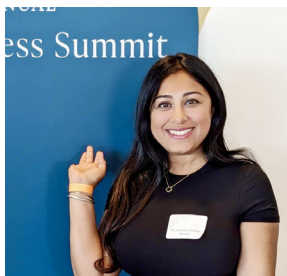


- AUA receives a seven-year renewal from the New York State Education Department, the longest term awarded for international medical schools. This recognition allows AUA students to complete all clinical rotations and obtain residencies in New York.
- In a landmark agreement, AUA partners with Florida International University to offer the Graduate Clinical Core Certificate Through this program, AUA students complete Preclinical Sciences in Antigua and then complete all of their core clinical rotations consecutively at hospitals affiliated with FIU's Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine.

- CAAM-HP—the legally constituted authority that evaluates MD programs in Caribbean countries—grants four-year reaccreditation to AUA, the maximum allowable.
- Sir Vivian Richards, world-renowned cricketer for the West Indies, becomes an official Ambassador for AUA.
- AUA's Emergency Medicine Training Center (EMTC) conducts the first Prehospital Trauma Life Support (PHTLS) course in the Eastern Caribbean.
- Global Health Track (GHT)\* established in collaboration with FIU's Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine.

- AUA addresses the challenges of the COVID-19 global pandemic by developing remote synchronous and asynchronous instruction in the Preclinical Sciences and by continuing clinical rotations at affiliated teaching hospitals (where safe and permitted).
- Further proving AUA's commitment to providing medical school opportunities to under-represented minorities, AUA signs additional agreements with US historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), including Fisk University in Tennessee and Central State.

- AUA's students presented at the first World Health Summit (WHS), held in Berlin on October 16-18, 2022 at the Young Researchers Symposium.



We literally started  
on a small island,  
and now the world  
is my oyster.”



**Dr. Jasmine  
Sawhne**  
**Class of 2013**

**Psychiatrist,  
Private Practice,  
California**

## Dr. Jasmine Sawhne: It's All in the Mind

### YOU'VE LIKELY HEARD OF SLEEP APNEA, BUT HAVE YOU HEARD OF EMAIL APNEA?

It's when you unconsciously hold your breath because you're so stressed out while getting through emails. That lack of oxygen inevitably drives up stress. Dr. Jasmine Sawhne, MD, MBA, a psychiatrist based in California, recently spoke about this in an article for GQ.

Since she graduated from AUA, Dr. Sawhne has become a subject matter expert in mental health. She also recently spoke on a panel about modern mental health at the 10th Annual SoCal Wellness Summit in Los Angeles.

But she wasn't always sure she wanted to be a psychiatrist. When she entered AUA in 2008, she intended to become a pediatrician, but after completing a psychiatry core rotation, she realized that her calling might be elsewhere.

“As I did psychiatry, I think I spent more time doing what I envisioned myself to be doing as a medical doctor, which is being with the patient and hearing them, validating them, and understanding their story - really brought me a lot of joy and fulfillment,” said Dr. Sawhne.

Thanks to her foundation at AUA, Dr. Sawhne is now a board-certified psychiatrist with expertise in treating a variety of mental health conditions, including depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, postpartum disorders, bipolar disorder, ADHD, PTSD, eating disorders, and psychosis. After completing her fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania, she served the community's needs through a nonprofit organization in Philadelphia, working with the most underserved populations. She is now based in California, where she began her private practice a few years ago.

Her advice to current AUA students is to go into each rotation with an open mind. “Sometimes we have our own preconceived biases. For instance, when I went into surgery, I felt like I was definitely not going to like it because I had a bias about what it would be like. Still, I ended up enjoying it and was surprised at how much procedural stuff I got to do,” she said.

Looking back at her time at AUA, Dr. Sawhne is filled with gratitude, “We literally started on a small island, and now the world is my oyster. I used my time there to set a solid foundation and have continued to build upon on that ever since.”

# Dr. Raaj Ruparel: A Product of Teamwork

**“I SENSED THAT AUA BELIEVED I HAD WHAT IT TOOK.** I think at that time, they were the only ones that I knew who really believed in me.” That was Dr. Raaj Ruparel, class of 2014, describing the support that made him the general surgeon he is today. “I heard of the island and the program from searching online,” he says, adding that the enrollment staff’s understanding and enthusiastic approach coaxed him into taking up the opportunity.

A community that fosters you can be transformative. For Dr. Ruparel, AUA was that beacon of belief, the memories of his time there marked by the bonds he forged. “The most memorable experiences were studying with my close friends and competing against each other to achieve the highest marks possible,” he recalls. “At the same time we were supportive and reassuring. We were a group of friends, forming a community of people who held each other to high standards.” Those connections proved to be enduring.

“The friends and colleagues that I trained with are still friends, and we talk often,” Dr. Ruparel says. The connections are a reminder of shared struggles and triumphs. He has something to say to the current crop of AUA students: “First piece of advice, if you don’t know, ask. Second piece of advice, always do what’s best for the

patient. Third piece of advice, if you don’t know, ask.”

It’s a simple mantra encapsulating the essence of medical practice – humility, patient-centered care, and the pursuit of knowledge. Dr. Ruparel says that AUA training prepared him to adapt to challenging medical situations, “My training and the training of my fellow students was demanding with respect to the curriculum, but also demanding with respect to our ability to be flexible,” he explains. “As physicians, we treat people from many walks of life. It’s important that we can relate to patients from a variety of backgrounds.”

Dr. Ruparel has a lot of people at the university to thank for how things turned out for him. “I could name every faculty, but if pressed to give one shout-out, it would certainly be to Dr. Moreno,” he shares. “He was perhaps the first academic professor, teacher, mentor, who both believed in me and provided me with the tough love that I needed to grow and mature.” Beyond the confines of medical education, life on the island offered moments of respite.

“We played a lot of golf,” Dr. Ruparel recalls with a smile. “Studying hard was balanced with playing hard during our time off. That often involved 18 holes after a big exam.”



... “ “ ...  
First piece of advice,  
if you don’t know,  
ask. Second piece  
of advice, always do  
what’s best for the  
patient. Third piece  
of advice, if you don’t  
know, ask.”

**Dr. Raaj Ruparel**  
**Class of 2014**

Surgeon,  
Mayo Clinic,  
Minnesota

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## Dr. Pedro Torres: At Home in the ER



**DR. PEDRO TORRES LIKES TO SAY THAT EMERGENCY MEDICINE CHOSE HIM INSTEAD OF THE OTHER WAY AROUND.**

Toward the end of his junior year of college, he walked by an ambulance company near his residence, which he never really noticed until that day.

He attended an open house and joined as an EMT the following day. "I quickly learned that healthcare was where I was meant to be. That gave me a different sense of motivation in the classroom to ensure I improved my grades." Once he completed his undergraduate degree, he joined AUA. "Wanting to know the details as to why things were happening with patients in the back of the ambulance motivated me to go the longer physician route," he shared.

As a student at AUA, he found a second home and was also able to flex his leadership skills in fun ways. As the interim president of the emergency medicine interest group, he helped re-establish the organization by setting up fundraisers, including a flag football tournament and a basketball tournament, which had great turnouts.

He also helped fundraise for a different cause by designing a t-shirt

inspired by anatomy professor Dr. Amiralli. The back of the shirt read, "Opportunity. Hard Work. Success," which was a mantra he said often in class. Dr. Amiralli supported the design, and the t-shirt sold well for a great cause.

His leadership skills for a great cause continued. While he was a resident in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, he organized a mission trip to nearby Vieques. He collaborated with other organizations in Puerto Rico, as they led a team of approximately 25 teammates, including paramedics, nurses, physicians, his mom, who's a social worker, and her colleague to provide mental health services. They treated over 200 people in a matter of five hours.

Among his many accomplishments, Dr. Torres is currently an Attending Physician in Emergency Medicine and Surgical Critical Care in Arizona. He also serves as a clinical assistant professor. Looking back on his experiences, Dr. Torres says, "If I could do it all again, I wouldn't change a thing. One of the things I tell my students before they choose a specialty is to not look at the time it takes to get there; think about the type of patient you want to have the privilege to care for and let that be the guide towards choosing a life of medicine."

...““...

Think about the type of patient you want to have the privilege to care for and let that be the guide towards choosing a life of medicine.”

**Dr. Pedro Torres  
Class of 2015**

Emergency Medicine/  
Surgical Critical Care,  
Carondelet Health,  
Arizona

# Dr. Rajat Chand: Lifeline in Food and Friends

**IF YOU ASKED DR. RAJAT CHAND ABOUT ONE OF HIS MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES AT AUA, HE MIGHT HAVE MENTIONED "SANDWICHES FILLED WITH CHICKPEA STUFFING."**

After spending all day in multiple classes, sometimes a delicious meal and catching up with friends are a much-needed reward and a great way to unwind. This was one way Dr. Chand stayed motivated as a student at AUA.

Plus, he had supportive teachers. "Dr. Glasser was a remarkable teacher and human being, just extremely kind and smart. I would say that he was probably my favorite teacher throughout my whole time on the island," said Dr. Chand.

He was also inspired by Dr. Krishnan, who taught pathology. "The moment class started, you would hear a loud, energetic, yet welcoming voice. The way he combined his photographic memory, intelligence, and personality into teaching a room full of hundreds of students sometimes was something that will never escape me."

Dr. Chand strove to model that teaching style when he was a professor at The University of North Carolina

at Chapel Hill School of Medicine. He also collaborates with other radiologists and publishers to produce medical education textbooks in the radiology field, including writing and editing.

Looking back on how he chose his specialty, radiology wasn't his first choice. He was initially thinking of internal medicine until he went to a hospital to shadow an internal medicine doctor, who introduced him to a friend in the radiology department. Once he got a brief chance to see what radiologists do, he was sold from that day forward.

Today he is a board-certified Interventional Radiologist and Diagnostic Radiologist and is affiliated with The Austin Radiological Association.

He advises those considering this specialty: "Some people get a little narrow-focused with radiology and think it's really laid back, and you only have to look at images. Some of that is true, and you can have a great lifestyle in radiology, but to be effective in an appropriate way, it really requires a deep amount of respect for the main specialties, namely internal medicine and surgery. I advise you to study as if you're studying for all three disciplines. That way, you will be the best radiologist."



...““...

Dr. Glasser was a remarkable teacher and human being, just extremely kind and smart."

• • • • •

**Dr. Rajat Chand  
Class of 2016**

Adult and Pediatric  
Vascular /Interventional  
Radiologist,  
University of North Carolina,  
North Carolina

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...““...

It was really teamwork that got me here. I can't say that I was the only reason that I'm as successful as I am.”

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### Dr. Dawn Roach Class of 2017

Fellow: Infectious Diseases,  
Mayo Clinic,  
Florida

## Dr. Dawn Roach: An Antiguan Daughter Takes Flight



**DR. DAWN ROACH'S MEDICAL JOURNEY BEGAN WITH A FULL SCHOLARSHIP FROM AN AUA-ANTIGUAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE.**

As an Antiguan and Barbuda native, this opportunity was a financial relief and a chance to study close to home.

One of the most memorable experiences during her time at AUA was the white coat ceremony. “That’s when it hits you like, oh wow, I’m actually doing this.” Her professors also left a lasting impact, including the late Dr. Glasser, whom she still remembers his lessons on neural pathways. She also fondly remembers

Dr. Deborah Russ, who was in charge of the very first Graduate Teaching Fellows group, which she was a part of, “She actually calls us her Antiguan daughters,” she shared.

From early on, Dr. Roach knew she wanted to be a doctor. Initially, she thought about pediatrics since she loves kids. She remembered watching the St. Jude’s Hospital commercials and wishing there was something she could do to help. When she had an opportunity to volunteer at a pediatric hospital, she felt heartbroken after seeing a baby in a cast.

Therefore, she contemplated Sports Medicine since she had always enjoyed playing and watching sports growing up. However, she ultimately decided on Internal Medicine, which led her to her current specialty, Infectious Diseases. “Infectious Diseases is one of those specialties where you see the patient as a whole, not just different parts. So I’m not just looking at the heart; I’m not just looking at the kidneys. And it’s one of the specialties where I can actually cure you if we have a cure. So that’s something that I really love,” she shared.

Dr. Roach has accomplished so much, including matching into Mayo Clinic Florida for Infectious Diseases. She is now the chief fellow for infectious diseases at Mayo Clinic Florida.

Reflecting on her achievements, Dr. Roach humbly acknowledged the role of her family and friends in her journey. "It was teamwork that got me here. I can't say that I was the only reason that I'm as successful

as I am," she stated, underscoring her friends' and family's efforts in her journey.

Speaking of family, Dr. Roach's little sister aims to follow in her footsteps by attending AUA and becoming a doctor. "She actually wants to be cooler than me. She wants to be a pediatric surgeon," she shared. "I really want AUA to keep growing and keep building so that the legacy can continue."



...““... ..

I really want AUA to keep growing, keep building so that the legacy can continue," she says, highlighting the importance of nurturing the next generation of medical professionals."

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**Dr. Dawn Roach**  
**Class of 2017**

Fellow: Infectious Diseases,  
Mayo Clinic,  
Florida

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...““... ..

Each case is like a puzzle. You don't know the full scope until you partner with other specialties.”

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**Dr. Ruby Sangha**  
**Class of 2019**

**Fellow: Pediatric Infectious Disease, Pittsburgh**

## Dr. Ruby Sangha: On the Joys of Collaboration

**DR. RUBY SANGHA HAS ALWAYS LOVED WORKING WITH KIDS. SHE KNEW EARLY ON THAT SHE WANTED TO GO INTO PEDIATRICS, WHICH WAS SOLIDIFIED DURING HER CLINICAL ROTATIONS.**

She also enjoyed the culture in pediatrics, which included things kids love, like sweets for special occasions and fun activities like dressing up for Halloween.

Her decision to further specialize in pediatric infectious disease was thanks to AUA and microbiology department professors Doctor Bharati and Doctor Pai. “They were amazing and made microbiology so fun. Their classes were detailed, and it was interesting to see how microbes can do so many things,” she shared. Dr. Sangha also got the opportunity to be a lead teaching assistant for cell biology and microbiology at AUA.

Being a pediatric infectious disease specialist also allows Dr. Sangha to be the social butterfly of the hospital by getting to interact with many different specialties such as surgery, orthopedics, and more.

“You get to work with everybody, which is really nice. Each case is like a puzzle where you don't know the

full scope until you partner with other specialties. It's gratifying seeing that patient get better,” said Dr. Sangha.

Dr. Sangha is currently a fellow at the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, one of the top ten children's hospitals in United States. “I'm super happy to be at a huge academic center like this. There's so much learning. There are also two different infectious disease teams, including transplant and general,” As a bonus, her husband, also a doctor, works only a few minutes away. “It's really nice. Plus, I'm from Northern Virginia/DC, and he's from Toronto. So Pittsburgh is kind of like in the middle, between our hometowns,” she added.

Dr. Sangha has also been published multiple times, including abstracts that have been accepted to different national conferences. Recently, she wrote an abstract on pediatric infectious disease for Saint Jude's in Memphis, which focused on acute respiratory infections and pediatric cancer patients.

She advises anyone looking to get into the medical field: “Don't compare yourself to anybody else. I did that, and it stressed me out. Remember, it's your journey. Medicine can sometimes be all-consuming, so make sure you're taking care of your health.”





“

AUA was more affordable when compared to U.S. schools. I feel that I got a very good education and I'm grateful they gave me the opportunity because it got me to where I am today.”

**Dr. Noelle Byrne**  
**Class of 2021**

Resident: Obstetrics  
and Gynaecology,  
New York

## Dr. Noelle Byrne: From Island Adventures to Medical Milestones

IT HAS NOT BEEN LONG SINCE DR. NOELLE BYRNE GRADUATED FROM AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ANTIGUA COLLEGE OF MEDICINE (AUA).

The Resident Physician at the Nassau University Medical Center in New York reflects upon her journey from her decision to pursue medicine to her graduation from AUA in 2021. “The first day at AUA was overwhelming,” Dr. Byrne recalls, reminiscing about the transition to a new country and the beginning of her medical school journey. Yet, amidst the challenges, she found a sense of purpose and determination to succeed. “The last day was bittersweet,” she reflects, “I was happy to be finished and move on to my residency, yet nervous for the next chapter.”

Choosing AUA was influenced by the recommendation of a friend and the belief that hard work would pay off. “If you work hard, it’ll pay off,” Dr. Byrne emphasizes, advocating for the potential of international medical graduates. “It’s less distracting because everyone is focused on the same goal,” she adds, highlighting the supportive environment at AUA. Dr. Byrne’s journey at AUA, depicted

as a movie, would admittedly fall into the genre of action. “Once you got into the swing of things, it wasn’t too bad,” she laughs, reflecting on the balancing act of study, class, and leisure time. “...I finished at the top of my class and got to leave early, which was nice.”

Dr. Byrne’s favorite hangout spot at AUA was the west side of the island. She shares the avenues that offered respite from the rigors of medical school. “I loved going to Coco’s hotel for a weekend. I also loved going to Garden Grill for brunch and Putters for trivia every week with my friends. I used to go to Cafe Bella to get coffee and breakfast all the time as well.”

Reflecting on her time at AUA, Dr. Byrne fondly remembers the kindness of the islanders, who welcomed her with open arms. “Everyone on the island was very kind,” she affirms, a testament to the warmth and hospitality that define the Antiguan spirit.

In expressing her gratitude, Dr. Byrne acknowledges the unwavering support and encouragement of her advisor, Par Premkumar, who has been instrumental in her success and who has been a guiding



presence throughout her journey. “Par has always kept in touch with me, checking how my experience in residency has been and she has always kept me in the loop of upcoming opportunities. I feel she is most influential as my advisor,”

As Dr. Byrne continues her journey as a resident physician, she finds fulfillment in caring for her patients and witnessing the miracle of childbirth. “Being able to follow my patients from conception to delivery is special,” she shares, “and seeing their joy makes it all worthwhile.”

Despite the challenges, Dr. Byrne’s dedication to her patients and her passion for medicine shine through. She offers a humorous take on parenting with a bumper sticker idea: “Enjoy your new baby and not sleeping for the next 18 years.” As Dr. Byrne’s professional journey continues, her memories of island adventures and cherished moments serve as a testament to the transformative power of community, camaraderie, and the pursuit of knowledge amidst the idyllic backdrop of Antigua.

...““..."

Being able to follow my patients from conception to delivery is special,” she shares, “and seeing their joy makes it all worthwhile.”

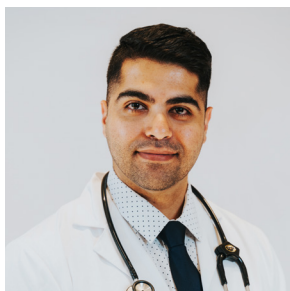
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### Dr. Noelle Byrne Class of 2021

Resident: Obstetrics and  
Gynaecology,  
New York

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Remain focused. I'm not saying don't go to the beach. But a balance between school and life is important.”

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**Dr. Hadi Rezaei**  
**Class of 2022**

Resident: Surgery,  
Mayo Clinic,  
Minnesota

## Dr. Hadi Rezaei: The Challenger

**EVEN BEFORE DR. HADI REZAEI WENT TO KINDERGARTEN, HE WAS ASSIDUOUSLY DISSECTING A CHICKEN HEART WITH HELP FROM HIS ELDER SISTER.**

“I think I was always interested in medicine. My elder sister was a family doctor,” says Dr. Rezaei, AUA class of 2022.

Getting to medical school in Canada wasn't easy, though, especially given the non-academic requirements. The first year, Rezaei only had volunteer experience; another year he was told he had no research experience; yet another year his lack of publications was brought up. Then one of his research coworkers told him about AUA. Dr. Rezaei got not only admission, but also a scholarship!

Dr. Rezaei found in AUA the spirit of the Japanese idea of *ikigai*, which involves doing “what you love, what you're good at, what the world needs, and what you can be paid for.” He also found his significant other there.

Dr. Rezaei said that while living on an island paradise had its charms, those could distract from the work, which was of a high standard.

Luckily for him, he says, “I was interested in the human body and the science behind it. I also liked working with my hands.” Dr. Rezaei says he was particularly lucky to have a mentor like Dr. Hassan Amiralli, part of the stable of professors at AUA who were famous, accomplished, and yet available.

Dr. Amiralli was the instructor of the small group Dr. Rezaei was part of. “He was extremely genuine,” Dr. Rezaei says of Dr. Amiralli. “A lot of people are trying to get to a better position. He was best at what he did. He was genuinely trying to make a difference in people's life. He was always there. He was the person who really cared. First, he was trying to instill some discipline. Later, he was easygoing. It was not about being a better teacher, but a better person.”

Dr. Rezaei, who now is at the Stony Brook University Hospital, says new students have to focus, given the temptations outside school.

“There is a mix of people everywhere,” he says. There are some people who are serious. Some are there for vacation. Remain focused. I'm not saying don't go to the beach. But a balance between school and life is important.”

# Dr. Byron Blanchard: The Lifelong Learner

**IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO PURSUE YOUR DREAMS; JUST ASK DR. BRYON BLANCHARD.**

"I wasn't a traditional student. I turned 40 the day before I started my residency." But he always knew he wanted to study emergency medicine. "I like to tell people that I've had almost every job in the hospital. I was a transporter, a paramedic, a tech, a walking assistant, and now I'm a doctor. I look at every job as important," he shared.

He also met his wife in the emergency room. He was a paramedic, and she was an emergency nurse. When it came time for Dr. Blanchard to apply for medical schools, his wife helped him, and they found AUA. To their delight, he was accepted.

Dr. Blanchard thrived at AUA and was very active on campus. He joined the Emergency Medicine Interest Group (EMIG) and worked his way through the ranks up to vice president. He was also involved in the Emergency Response Team (ERT), who would respond to emergencies on campus.

He held various roles in ERT, including vice president, and helped the group stay sharp by doing drills. "I would activate them. I had friends

who would stage a sprained ankle or a hurt hand or something like that. That way, I could show the ERT members how to do splints and other procedures in the field," he shared.

He also organized a large event with a few of his friends who were emergency medicine physicians. "It was a huge showing of students who showed up, and they kind of went through different procedural things, from how to assess a patient, start IVs and different assessment techniques," he said.

Today, Dr. Blanchard is preparing to wrap up his first year as an emergency medicine resident at the University of Rochester. "I absolutely adore it. Emergency medicine is something that I really wanted going into AUA on my first day, and now I'm actually a doctor. So, I have a big smile on my face every day," he said.

However, just because he graduated doesn't mean he's done learning. He's learning how to assess patients through telemedicine, which will help alleviate overburdened ERs and shift non-emergency cases into urgent care-type settings.

Looking back, Dr. Blanchard has nothing but gratitude for AUA, "I'm doing extremely well. I'm super happy to be where I am, and I wouldn't be there without you."



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**Dr. Byron Blanchard**  
**Class of 2023**

Resident: Emergency  
Medicine,  
University of Rochester,  
New York

2023

2022

2021

2019

2017

2016

2015

2014

2013

2012

2011

2010

2009

2007

# DR. PETER BELL: THE PROVOST WHO FLIES HIGH



Dr. Peter Bell



**H**e made a career anesthetizing people, but the life of Dr. Peter Bell, Provost of AUA, has been more exciting than that of most. Early on, when deciding what he would do in life, he came up with three criteria.

"I wanted to be in a profession where I can make a difference, help people, and work internationally," says Dr. Bell, who is the first physician in his family.

Dr. Bell earned his M.D. and doctorate from the J.W. Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany before joining the German navy as a medical officer. He also trained as a flight surgeon in

the U.S. Naval Aerospace Medical Institute in Pensacola, Florida.

During that time he was trained to fly helicopters. When part of a military jet squadron, he learned to fly the back seat of F-15s and Tornados.

Dr. Bell decided then to focus on anesthesiology. Why that?

"Where anesthesiologists go, they get free coffee," he says. More seriously, he adds, "I was interested in physiology and intensive care. Anesthesiology is a combination of manual work and intellectual challenge.

"At the time, there was no specialization in emergency medicine. That was mainly done by an anesthesiologist. I have always been interested in emergency medicine."

After leaving the navy, he found nothing compelling about working for entities that he described as being focused on "maximizing patient throughput."

So, in 2001, Dr. Bell packed his bags and moved to Antigua, where he chaired the anesthesiology and intensive care departments at the old government Holberton Hospital.

On the side, he set up a non-profit that worked with a local helicopter company to provide



medevac services for the islands. That is when his life changed.

AUA founder Neal Simon met Dr. Bell and asked him to join the AUA team. Dr. Bell agreed, and became one of the first members of the faculty. "The first class had nine students," he says. "The provost, Dr. Schwartz, thought there were only eight because there was one set of identical twins."

In 2008, Dr. Bell was asked to help AUA expand further.

So, as Executive Dean for Clinical Sciences, he built out the Clinical Sciences program in the U.S. He ultimately moved to NYC to reduce the travel involved. He developed AUA's teaching hospital network across the country, and built strong affiliations with teaching hospitals in the US, U.K. and India.

Helping AUA grow, Dr. Bell also established a significant affiliation with Florida International University's Herbert Wertheim College for Medicine and Robert Stempel College for Public Health and Social Work. He also established AUA's strong global health track, which is a very popular program. "We are the only international medical school from the Caribbean which is formally affiliated with a U.S. medical schools," Dr. Bell states.

In 2021, as provost, he began overseeing all academic programs, including the clinical and preclinical sciences.

Referring to AUA's mission states, he wants to give all students, including those from traditionally underrepresented minorities — a chance they would not get in U.S. medical schools.

About AUA's strong alumni network, he says, "We are very proud they made it through a challenging program, and that they transitioned successfully into the next step of career – residency programs. A growing number are now attendings, and in leadership positions in their chosen specialty. It is indeed an #AUAPROUD moment."



# AUA'S VERNON SOLOMON: GOING BEYOND ACADEMICS TO CREATE A FAMILY-LIKE ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS

**W**hen you step off the plane in Antigua for the very first time, chances are you'll be met with a warm smile and a hearty welcome from Mr. Vernon Solomon. Amidst the hustle and bustle of the airport, amidst the delegation of AUA staff and tables laden with goodies, there he is, extending a heartfelt welcome. "We're there in the airport to greet them, to welcome them into Antigua, and to welcome them into the AUA family. It's about making that connection the moment they arrive," he shares. He added, "I have the privilege of being the master of ceremony for our commencement ceremony. So, I would've witnessed the student's journey from their arrival to campus to them proudly walking across the stage at commencement, ready to embark on their careers as doctors."

Mr. Solomon is a visible leader and a familiar face on campus; donning multiple hats with grace and dedication. As the Chief Operating Officer of AUA's Antigua Campus and Senior Vice President of AUA, his commitment to students and alumni shines through in countless ways. From spearheading initiatives like the Emergency Response Team (ERT) and the Emergency Medicine Interest Group (EMIG) to venturing beyond campus borders with educational programs in India alongside partners like Mrs.



Par Premkumar, his passion knows no bounds. "The challenges in healthcare systems and lack of certain resources in some instances are similar to those in Antigua. Being able to share our knowledge in India is something we're immensely proud of," he explains.

But Mr. Solomon's role transcends routine administrative duties; it's about fostering a sense of belonging and kinship among students. "Our students aren't just faces in a crowd; they become family," he confides. For many, Antigua



**Vernon Solomon**  
Sr. Vice President & COO

becomes their home for a significant chunk of their lives, and Mr. Solomon ensures that they feel supported every step of the way. From being the go-to person during accidents in the early days of AUA to orchestrating evacuation flights during the pandemic, he's the unwavering pillar of support in times of need.



Looking ahead, Mr. Solomon isn't slowing down. He's eagerly anticipating the opening of a state-of-the-art 1,000-seat conference center on campus, set as the venue for the United Nations 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States. And his vision for AUA extends far beyond physical infrastructure; he's on a mission to boost the visibility of AUA, globally. "I'm working to showcase AUA just as you would see any other medical school in the US or across the globe. We are not just another Caribbean medical school or just some international medical school. We are a top-tier medical school, full stop."

In Mr. Solomon's world, every student is a cherished member of the AUA family, every challenge an opportunity, and every milestone a cause for celebration. As he continues in his role, the future of AUA continues to shine bright.





# BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO EDUCATION



**Dr. Reza Sanii, Former  
Dean of Student Affairs**



**H**e was the person you went to if you wanted to learn about how the brain and lungs interact. In fact, some of that research must be from his own lab. However, until he retired, Dr. Reza Sanii managed logistical issues at AUA. He was dean of student affairs and the College of Graduate Education.

Dr. Sanii grew up in Iran, earning a medical degree from Jundishapur University, and working in that country, including in the army, before the fall of the Shah's regime in 1979.

He moved to Canada where he earned his PhD in medical physiology from the University of Manitoba in 1985. For that, he used both human and animal models to tease out details of how the brain controls ventilation.

Hired by the university, Dr. Sanii went on to become the director of the Sleep Disorder Lab. He moved to Ross University for three years.

Then he found AUA, and spent 17 years crafting strategies to improve the student experience before retiring.

At AUA, Dr. Sanii says he enjoyed teaching physiology. However, he says his focus has always been on the kind of education AUA provides. He hoped he accomplished that by doing his bit to make AUA the best medical school in the region. Two factors drew him to AUA. One of them was the president's single-minded focus on education. "Through his wisdom, the idea of making AUA the best, he recruited very sophisticated faculty from North America and India," Dr. Sanii says.

The other factor was the camaraderie he saw. "From the get-go, the atmosphere was friendly. There was respect and collegiality within the faculty. They were like one family," he says.

According to him, the friendly environment had a direct impact on student education and success. "The students remain with us beyond education at AUA – even in our personal lives," Dr. Sanii says. "When I was sick at the hospital, a number of students flew in from all over the U.S. to visit me. This only shows the bonding and friendship we build in the AUA family. We're friends, we're colleagues."

# CONTRIBUTING TO GLOBAL HEALTH



**Dr. Jagbir Nagra,**  
Former Executive  
Dean of AUA



It was truly exciting for me at AUA, since it was in its formative years when I was the Executive Dean at AUA (from 2009 to 2014). I was captivated by the beautiful campus and the scenic beauty of Antigua.

The students' diversity in terms of work experience, ethnicity, and culture made campus life exciting. Members of the faculty were from different countries

but were a cohesive team with a unified vision.

We established a state-of-the-art skills lab and simulation suites with the latest technologies.

The Educational Enhancement Department's focused attention and Student Mentor Program really helped students first cope, then excel.

The library facilities were constantly upgraded, thanks to the great staff. The community outreach programs helped local people and students who could get exposure to primary health care in addition to the mandatory hospital visits.

The administration supported new initiatives for academic enhancement, and ensured the lecture halls and breakout rooms had the best teaching aids.

The accreditation teams found good reason to appreciate the commitment of President Neal Simon, administration staff, faculty and students. They saw us through site visits by the CAAM Accreditation teams, and the Medical Board of California.

My most memorable moments were during the orientation programs, the white coat ceremonies and the convocations that marked the milestones in the academic and professional advancement of the young people who put their faith in us.

# A GIFT THAT GOES ON GIVING

**T**he 11 years of my career before I retired were the most enjoyable and rewarding ones for me. That was when I worked as the university's senior vice president for enrollment management, and its Chief Operating Officer.

While my colleagues' professionalism and dedication made work truly a pleasure, it was dealing with our students that made it particularly fulfilling.

Our students, like no others I've seen elsewhere, came in prepared for the most difficult and, ultimately, the most gratifying years of their life. They already knew they would gain profound knowledge about human health and well-being, and that they would be expected to contribute to an

ever-evolving field dedicated to helping humanity.

Perhaps as a result of that preparation and training, I found AUA doctors to be caring, kind, and empathetic physicians, a solace to those going through the worst days of their lives. They also carried their knowledge lightly, working with grace and humility.

Living in Florida, I am in regular contact with some of our grads practicing here. I am so very proud of each of them. It is also nice to have some physician friends I can call on for advice. And yes, I have done so!

My heartfelt congratulations to all of our graduates on this, the 20th anniversary of American University of Antigua, College of Medicine.



**Dick Woodward,**  
Former Senior Vice President for  
Enrollment Management, COO

## GRADS WHO ARE STILL CLOSE FRIENDS

→ Dr. Danny LaBarbera, who is the assistant medical director of a hospital group in Tampa, overseeing over 20 physicians.

→ Dr. Christopher Buevas is the regional medical director of a primary care network in his home town of Orlando, leading over 400 PCPs.

→ Dr. Ally Bagenholm is down in Palm Beach with her husband and fellow graduate Dr. Ehsan Esmaeili. Dr. Bagenholm has her own concierge primary care practice. Dr. Esmaeili is a renowned hand surgeon in South Florida and runs a sole practice.

→ Dr. Angela Echeverria has been a vascular surgeon practicing for 14 years in the Naples area.

→ Dr. Vamsi Nakula is a respected internist at the AdventHealth medical group. Dr. Melanie James is the director of the vascular surgery program at AdventHealth North Pinellas.





# STAY CONNECTED

Reach out to our Alumni Relations team  
at [alumni@auamed.org](mailto:alumni@auamed.org) or (212) 661-8899 ext. 164.  
We'd love to hear from you!





# Nostalgic Notes

Remembering  
the good times  
—a toast to the past,  
the present, and the  
future.



















# OUR MISSION IS YOUR SUCCESS **OUR STORY IS YOUR STORY**

At American University of Antigua (AUA), we take pride in each and every medical professional that graduates from this institution. Each of you are the reason we exist, and we are forever grateful for your continued support of AUA and our vision to create the medical leaders of tomorrow. We are who we are because of your commitment to quality medicine.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE AUA ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

**[WWW.AUAALUMNI.ORG](http://WWW.AUAALUMNI.ORG)**