Medical Students Host “Discover Medicine” Event for Local High Schools

Inspiring the next generation of physicians and surgeons begins with exposure. Frances Morales, class of 2023, strongly believes in that early exposure can help inspire middle and high school students to pursue a pre-medical track. Her efforts range from creating an engineering mentorship program at Buford Middle School to more recently teaming up with fellow Hoos Anjola Toyon and Hibo Wehelie (class of 2025) to host local high school students at the School of Medicine on February 15th for an event called Discover Medicine.

**Q: Tell us more about Discover Medicine and what it entails.**

A: Discover Medicine is a series of events hosted by UVA School of Medicine’s Student National Medical Association (SNMA) each year. Each event brings together about 30 high school students from Charlottesville and Monticello High Schools to learn about the different organ systems and to engage in hands-on activities with current medical students, faculty, and residents. The event I hosted, with the help of fellow medical students Anjola Toyon and Hibo Wehelie, focused on the Gastrointestinal System. During this event, we hosted an Anatomy & Pathology session led by Drs. David Moyer, Robin LeGallo, and Brett Kurpiel. With the help of Mr. Ryne Ackard, the director of the UVA's Simulation Collaborative, the kids also had a chance to practice abdominal ultrasound exams on medical student volunteers.

**Q: What led you to be involved with the local middle school and high school students?**

A: I love to teach and am a strong advocate of early exposure to both engineering and medicine for middle school and high school students. I got involved in Discover Medicine to inspire graduating high school students to pursue the pre-medical track, with The Haven to better understand how the unique challenges of being homeless affect one's health, and with the Boys & Girls Club because making art with elementary school kids is not only fun but allows me to teach and engage with a younger group of students. The Engineering Mentorship Program at Buford Middle School is a program that I initiated in 2018, with the help of Brendan Martin (former Engineering Instructor at Buford), when I served as President of the Engineering Student Council. I created this program to improve low retention rate of minority students to successive engineering electives offered by Buford MS. Engineering students from UVA travel to Buford MS once per week to assist students with their projects and serve as 1-on-1 mentors.

**Q: How have these experiences shaped you?**

A: All of these community outreach efforts have allowed me to gain teaching experience with students at different levels of learning which will be helpful as a future resident when I am helping to teach other residents, medical students, and patients. I plan to continue these outreach efforts as a resident and attending physician with the goal of creating sustainable programs for kids to explore how engineering is an integral part of medical innovation and research. I’ve also learned that it’s important to learn from the community you help to serve so you can provide the most appropriate support.

**Q: Are there ways for others to be involved?**

A: Yes! Students are welcome to get involved in any of the following community outreach programs. Faculty can get involved in Discover Medicine.

[Discover Medicine: UVA SNMA](https://med.virginia.edu/snma/about/discover-medicine/)

The Haven Clinic: Ocean Aiello ([ocean@thehaven.org](mailto:ocean@thehaven.org))

Boys & Girls Club: [Fralin Museum of Art](https://uvafralinartmuseum.virginia.edu/program/early-visions) [Early Visions](https://uvafralinartmuseum.virginia.edu/program/early-visions)

Buford MS Engineering Mentorship Program: [UVA's Madison House](https://www.madisonhouse.org/community-partners).

Special thanks to Frances Morales for sharing more about these efforts!