

**COMMENT**


# Pediatric research's societal commitment to diversity: a regional approach to an international crisis

Eastern Society for Pediatric Research – DEI Committee and 2021 ESPR pre-conference DEI session speakers\*

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The Eastern Society for Pediatric Research (ESPR) recognizes that science is heightened by the involvement of a diverse range of individuals who can bring their unique perspectives and life experiences in the pursuit of scientific knowledge in all areas of pediatrics research. Unfortunately, the United States physician scientist workforce does not equally reflect the national population with Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, certain Pacific Islander groups, and women underrepresented.<sup>1</sup> Similar inequities have been documented around the world through countless studies that examined salaries, staff rank, publication in journals, grants, and recognitions like awards and speaking engagements. The long-standing lack of diversity, including but not limited to background, age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, geography, disability, socioeconomic status, area of expertise, level of experience, thinking style, and skill set informs a national conversation regarding how to best increase the presence of underrepresented minorities in the biomedical research fields. Lack of minorities in leadership positions resulting in limited role models and mentorship coupled with gender and implicit biases are cited obstacles for pursuit of an academic pediatric career.<sup>2–4</sup>

In recognition of the increased awareness of the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in pediatric scientist career development and within academic pediatrics, the ESPR, one of the four regional pediatric research societies, virtually hosted a workshop entitled, “MENTORING: Investing in young underrepresented researchers, investing in the future of pediatrics research” as part of its 2021 annual national meeting. By creating program aimed at fostering academic growth and advancement among those who identify as Underrepresented in Medicine Minorities (URiM), the goal of the session was to educate attendees on how racial bias, implicit bias, and microaggressions can impede academic success in pediatric research. We present an abbreviated version of the session to provide a potential model for other smaller research/academic organizations considered on how to address these timely issues within their programming. Specific strategies outlined to improve academic advancement of URiM in pediatric research include:

1. Establishing mentorship teams for an individual that include career, research, and peer mentors who jointly meet regularly with the mentee to establish goals, deadlines, and provide assistance with barriers.
2. Establishing a cross-institutional structured mentoring program, which reduces the financial and administrative

burden of each single institution to provide these resources and can provide mentorship absent of the influence of the local politics, which pervade all large academic medical centers. This is also helpful to URiM trainees who hail from pediatric training programs based in community hospital settings, who may not have access to research-specific resources or expertise.

3. As with ESPR's annual meeting, providing a platform for showcasing research and enabling networking with mentors across universities and hospitals and providing awards focused on URiM to increase academic visibility.

In selecting speakers, a conscientious effort was made to ensure that presenter consisted of a heterogeneous group of experts representing different genders and races/ethnicities. This both avoided controversies associated with all-male panels and provided role models to URiM attendees. The Speakers addressed disparities, biases, and mentorship of groups underrepresented in pediatric research. To outline the overarching themes discussed during the meeting, each speaker's points are summarized in Table 1.

Given the historical focus of the society on scientific presentations, there was uncertainty regarding attendee acceptance of the session. One hundred and forty participants registered for the workshop and 50 participants were recorded attending the workshop. Of the 70 people who completed the whole meeting evaluation, 28 had attended the workshop, 50% ( $n = 14$ ) rated the workshop “Excellent,” and 43% ( $n = 12$ ) rated it “Very Good.” This should be reassuring to other local/regional societies concerned about how well received these types of sessions would be within the context of a scientific meeting. Moving forward, there is interest in expanding this programming beyond the confines of the annual symposium, specifically by facilitating cross-institutional URiM mentorship opportunities for trainees via virtual meetings.

As a result of this workshop, the ESPR Diversity and Planning Committees have released the policy stating,

“We strongly believe that any person in the pediatric research field, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or ability, deserves equal access to career opportunities. We believe that diversity in the pediatric research field contributes to a higher quality of research and clinical care. In keeping with these beliefs, the ESPR organizing committee is composed of officers from diverse backgrounds who are

\*A list of authors and their affiliations appears at the end of the paper.

**Table 1.** Highlights from ESPR pre-conference session speakers on “MENTORING: Investing in young underrepresented researchers, investing in the future of pediatrics research.”

Name of the speaker	Academic position	Title of talk	Synopsis
Carole Sargent, PhD	Founding Director Office of Scholarly Publications Georgetown University Washington, DC	What is imposter syndrome costing your medical facility?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Imposter syndrome” is anxiety about being exposed as unqualified in high-achieving roles, can cost individuals tens of thousands in lost productivity, under-negotiation of salaries and careers, and unexplored opportunities</li> <li>• Just knowing the prevalence of “Imposter Syndrome” among high achievers can lessen its impact</li> <li>• Among BIPOC faculty and women generally, internalized racism and sexism undermine scholar confidence</li> <li>• In publishing, researchers with imposter syndrome often choose lower-ranked journals</li> </ul>
Keisha Bell, MD	Vice Chair of Inpatient Operations Chief, Division of Pediatric Critical Care, Director of Pediatric Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Medstar Georgetown University Hospital Washington, DC	Microaggressions and race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding how bias and microaggressions are experienced by marginalized communities with a goal of mitigation is essential to create a true sense of “belonging” for everyone</li> <li>• There are 4 types of racism: systemic, institutionalized, personally mediated, and internalized. In medicine, they can manifest in patient care outcomes, in interactions with colleagues, and can influence the work and learning environments</li> <li>• In mentoring URiM junior faculty and trainees, consider the impact of racial microaggressions as delineated by Dr. Derald Wing Sue</li> <li>• Excavation, acknowledgement, and mitigation of race-based biases will improve the work and learning environments for URiM and will have the added benefit of enhancing our ability to provide equitable care to our patients</li> </ul>
Linda Aponte-Patel, MD	Associate Vice Chair for Education, Diversity & Inclusion, Department of Pediatrics, Columbia University Irving Medical Center Section Chief, Pediatric Critical Care Medicine NewYork-Presbyterian Morgan Stanley Children’s Hospital New York City, NY	Building and maintaining a diversity and inclusion program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific ways to support URiM in the academic setting:</li> <li>• Development of a Departmental Pediatric Diversity and Inclusion Council (PDIC) to support (URiM) trainees and implementation of a trainee-driven diversity/inclusion curriculum</li> <li>• Creation of a biannual Diversity and Inclusion Grand Rounds series and an Annual Celebration of Diversity Symposium, featuring DEI national leaders, and sessions on community outreach</li> <li>• Having an official departmental role to support these efforts, e.g. Associate Vice Chair for Education, Diversity and Inclusion</li> </ul>
Patrick Jackson, MD	Program Director Surgical Residency Program MedStar Georgetown University Hospital-Washington Hospital Center Washington, DC	Mentors, sponsors, and how to get the most from the relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To maximize the benefit of mentorship, a common understanding of expectations is critical. Mentees must be open, intentional, reliable and consistent</li> <li>• Meet regularly with mentor with a set agenda</li> <li>• A valuable mentor experience includes the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An intellectually/emotionally safe setting</li> <li>• Providing relevant feedback and being open to discussion</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

committed to promoting diversity within the meeting, and organization, as well. The council and planning committee will promote diverse representation in panels, plenaries and group sessions.”

The ultimate mission of regional pediatric research societies is to enrich the training experience and assist young investigators in successfully embarking on a research career within academic medicine. It is increasingly recognized that achieving

this goal requires embracing DEI initiatives that (1) create the space for historically underrepresented individuals to develop into innovate investigators, and collaborators with institutions in shaping the processes impacting URiM representation and advancement in academia, (2) create leaders of an inclusive network of mentors for future generations, and (3) to provide a more welcoming environment to groups traditionally underrepresented in pediatric research. We hope the workshop

outlined above provides a model for other research-based organizations considering incorporating this work into their programming.

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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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