



Roshny Vijayakar

Project HSF Class of 2017-18

Undergraduate: Williams College

Graduate School: Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine

Current: 1st year medical student

What inspired you to get involved with HSF?

Dr. Dorsey visited my college to give an info session on HSF back in November 2016, when I thought I was still going to medical school straight from undergrad. My passion at the time was in growing a volunteer doula collective that my friend and I established in the community surrounding our college town, so the community-based health work with a focus on women's care at a different life stage piqued my interest. Honestly, I was resistant to the idea of taking another year 'off,' as I had already done so between high school and college...but the more I considered it, something about this opportunity screamed ONCE IN A LIFETIME, so I just took the plunge. It ended up changing the course of my medical career for the better, and I have no regrets.

What was your most memorable experience as a fellow?

It is so hard to pick just one because Fellows wear about ten different hats! I will admit that youth program was one of my favorite parts of the day though. I will never forget the wonder in my kindergartners' eyes when I had them dig down into a Tupperware full of dirt and pull up their very own sweet potato. Or one second grader's joy at having learned enough math to beat all her classmates at a multiplication challenge. I have endless stories about all my health partners (we still keep in touch), complete strangers, wild van rides, and the unsung heroes of a whole community that respects and cherishes what HSF represents. As a fellow you'll be invited warmly into people's homes, churches, and family gatherings like you've always been there, and it is difficult to appreciate how special that is until you leave.

What was an unexpected aspect of the fellowship?

There is no way to really prepare for the breadth of experiences you will have as a Fellow, especially because each year is so different. It makes explaining the position quite challenging when recruiting, and although we have improved our ability to define HSF, part of the fun is all the little surprises. I don't think I ever expected to have such an active role in helping finish and shape the Hotel and future expansions...or to go on such unique excursions! Another awesome surprise that cropped up (pun kind of intended) my year was the local farm partnership, which has the potential to really complement HSF's community wellness emphasis going forward.

How has the fellowship impacted you professionally and personally?

I came away from the Fellowship a much more mature individual, in some subtle but important ways. The whole experience of juggling multiple challenging yet rewarding programs in a dedicated team setting—with a constant emphasis on professionalism and leadership—just prepares a person to handle life's curveballs with grace. Honestly, the predictable structure and comparatively limited responsibilities of medical school (at least the academic years) have made the workload feel lighter than it is, mainly because the Fellowship prepared me to be flexible and adaptable, and to work well with a variety of personalities.

Why would you recommend HSF to future interns, volunteers, and fellows?

The experience of immersing oneself in highly team-based service work, especially in an environment that may be new and different, will help you develop as a future professional, no matter what you want to do next. Even beyond the personal benefits, however, working with HSF affords you an opportunity to make a difference in lives that are often overlooked: those of physically and mentally ill or disabled adults, seniors, and at-risk youth in an underserved region. The impact of the programs you plan, the clinic you run, and the relationships you build are apparent every single day. And best of all, your role is crucial to the continued success of the organization—HSF simply could not function without Fellows, volunteers, or interns—so you will almost certainly be giving as much as you get from doing something good.

How are you using your HSF experience in your career?

A glaringly apparent benefit of the Fellowship in my daily life as medical student is patient skills. Whether or not a fellow spends a considerable amount of time doing clinic intake (which certainly does help), just the sheer frequency with which you partner with people of all ages and abilities to make positive changes in their lives, prepares you to walk the walk and talk the talk of at least 50% of being a good physician: taking an outstanding history, doing a thorough physical exam, and writing a succinct but informative note in 15-20min. It is all about building a genuine relationship in a short amount of time, and I would venture to say that any Fellow is more adept at that skill after a year at HSF than is your average medical student.