

HOSA-Future Health Professionals

eMAGAZINE

Spring 2026

Champions of Tomorrow

hosa
future health professionals



Letter From The President

by **Ria Mohan**, 2025–26 HOSA International President



Dear HOSA Members and Future Health Professionals,

I am overwhelmed with gratitude as we close out our eMagazine series for the 2025–2026 year. This final edition is more than a reflection, it is a testament to everything we have built together. Each story, milestone, and voice captured throughout this year represents the strength of this organization and the passion that unites us all. As I reflect on this year, “thank you” feels far too small to capture what I truly feel. It has been one of the greatest honors of my life to serve alongside you and to witness your unwavering commitment to something greater than yourselves. From classrooms to conference stages, from local service projects to national platforms, you have shown what it means to lead with heart.

In the spirit of embodying Champions of Tomorrow, I am especially excited for what this year’s International Leadership Conference (ILC) represents. For the first time, we will see our Postsecondary/Collegiate members at the HOSA Research Forum, sharing work that reflects academic rigor and a deep commitment to advancing healthcare. At the same time, I am also incredibly inspired by the future leaders of this organization, the students who have taken the step to apply for the International Executive Council. Your willingness to serve is what keeps HOSA moving forward. If you are considering applying, I encourage you to reach out to your State Advisor and take that leap. With President-Elect Jeet Sridhar at the helm, this next generation of leaders is in exceptionally capable hands. I am excited to see how his leadership will guide HOSA into its next chapter of growth following ILC.

And as we celebrate 50 years, we will also have the privilege of welcoming back our alumni— individuals who once stood where you are now and have carried the mission of HOSA into their careers and communities. Seeing them return to connect with current members after half a century is a powerful reminder that HOSA is not just an experience, it is a lifelong community; and you are an integral part of that.

You have supported one another, lifted each other up, and continuously redefined what it means to be a HOSA member. As we prepare for June, I encourage each of you to step into ILC with confidence and intention. Whether you are competing, attending sessions, networking, or simply taking in the experience, know that you belong in every room you enter. This is your moment to celebrate the dedication and growth that brought you here.

Now that you’re here, introduce yourself to someone new. Ask questions. Share your story. Most importantly, remember that your impact extends far beyond a single week in Indiana, you are part of a legacy that continues to grow stronger with each passing year.

Thank you for allowing me to walk this journey with you. Thank you for your trust, your passion, and your belief in what HOSA stands for. I cannot wait to celebrate all that we are, and all that we are becoming, together in June.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ria Mohan".

Ria Mohan
International President,
HOSA–Future Health Professionals

The Golden Bridge

From HOSA's Roots to Its Global Future

by Aaron Summerall, 2025-26 Central Region Vice President

Before HOSA filled convention centers, it was a conversation.

In 1974, in Nashville, Indiana, a small group gathered to imagine something that did not yet exist. There was no international stage, no massive membership base, and no guarantee that the idea would last. There was only a belief that students interested in healthcare deserved a place to grow, connect, and lead.



Lynne McGee Ingle

Two years later, that same idea took form. In 1976, through the Constitution Committee and chartering efforts in Texas, HOSA was officially established. What began as a conversation would become an organization that now stretches far beyond what its earliest leaders imagined.

That is what makes the 2026 International Leadership Conference (ILC) in Indianapolis so meaningful. As HOSA marks its 50th Anniversary, the organization returns to the same region where some of

its earliest planning conversations took place. For the Central Region, this is more than a destination. It places HOSA back near where its earliest ideas took shape, while standing fully inside what the organization has become.

For Lynne McGee Ingle, HOSA's first National President, the earliest days looked nothing like the organization members know today. Ingle, who represented Brevard High School in North Carolina, remembered that it was not even called HOSA at first. It was the North Carolina Health Careers Club, and its atmosphere was informal, social, and centered on learning.

"There weren't really competitions to start with," Ingle said.

Instead, running for office was one of the biggest points of excitement. Members campaigned with buttons, slogans, and school spirit. Conferences felt more like gatherings than highly structured productions. The formal dance was one of the highlights, with students dressing as if they were headed to prom.

Still, even in those early years, there was structure beneath the warmth. Officers followed scripts, worked on timing, attended etiquette training, and learned how to carry themselves in leadership settings. Ingle laughed remembering that after long days, officers would bring back ice cream, store it in a bathtub packed with ice, and enjoy it together later. The details were smaller then, but the sense of community was already strong.



In 1976, Ingle traveled to New Jersey with other HOSA leaders and advisors to discuss the creation of a national organization. "We had no idea what we were doing," she said. Adults helped guide the process, but even then, the foundation was being laid for something enduring.

What Ingle did know was that the opportunity mattered. HOSA gave students a chance to explore healthcare, leadership, and purpose without boxing them into one future. That flexibility stayed with her long after her officer term ended. She became a nurse, later taught health occupations classes, and remained connected to the organization for years.

Looking back, she said the original foundation was strong, even if the future scale was impossible to picture.

"The stability was there, but we never imagined it would go outside the United States."

—Lynne McGee Ingle



New officers at the first ILC

By the early 2000s, that growth was impossible to ignore.

For Reginald “Reggie” Coleman, who served as HOSA National President from 2005 to 2006, the organization was entering a period of transformation. Coleman, the first National President from Indiana, remembered moments when the shift became visible.

“The organization felt like it was bursting at the seams.” —Reggie Coleman

He remembered walking into national sessions where the energy in the room felt different than before, where more members were showing up, more voices were being heard, and it felt clear that HOSA was outgrowing what it had once been.

Students were beginning to see HOSA not just as an activity, but as a pathway. Coleman traced that shift to stronger member ownership and to leaders who encouraged members to think beyond what felt immediately possible. In Indiana, he said, that change helped members take pride in the organization and believe that leadership was within reach.

That expanding sense of possibility also shaped the 2004 transition from Health Occupations Students of America to HOSA—Future Health Professionals. For Coleman, that change represented growth in the clearest sense. The old name had begun to limit what the organization could become. The new one created space for a wider future, one that welcomed more pathways, more perspectives, and eventually more places.



Reginald “Reggie” Coleman

He remembered early conversations about expanding beyond the United States, and moments like Guam joining made that possibility feel real. For Coleman, the shift was not just structural. It was also personal. As an African American student leader from the Midwest, he understood that representation mattered. Visibility mattered. Being on stage and showing other students what was possible mattered.

Even with all of that growth, Coleman said HOSA’s strongest qualities remained steady. It still instilled leadership and tenacity in members at every level. It still offered opportunity regardless of a member’s school, state, or background. It still prepared people for rooms they did not yet know they would enter.

That sense of possibility is what members today continue to experience.

One of Niha Goel's earliest memories in HOSA was not an award or a title. It was a moment at lunch, when an older member noticed she was one of the only seventh graders involved and took the time to make her feel welcome.

For Goel, a ninth grader in Cypress, California, that moment stayed with her. It shaped how she saw HOSA and how she saw herself within it.

Goel began her HOSA journey in seventh grade and was one of only two seventh graders from her school to attend the State Leadership Conference (SLC) that year. She still remembered having to choose between a family commitment and her first competitive event, Extemporaneous Health Poster. She chose HOSA, won first at SLC, and later placed in the top ten at ILC.

That early decision changed everything.

Since then, Goel has grown through competition, service, leadership development, and creativity. She earned the Barbara James Service Award Gold in seventh grade, eighth grade, and again this year. She won a California HOSA Founder's Scholarship in middle school. This year, she designed the winning California HOSA pin for the state's 40th year and later won the California HOSA talent show after teaching herself guitar not long before CADCA.

Yet for all the achievements, the reason she stayed in HOSA was much simpler.

“The biggest thing that drew me to HOSA was honestly the community.” —Niha Goel

Goel said competition matters, but students who come into HOSA only for competition often do not yet understand everything it offers. Through HOSA, she found service, leadership, partnerships, and a broader sense of purpose.

Perhaps her most powerful reflection came when she described what HOSA had taught her through competition. It was not simply confidence. It was how to be nervous in a safe community.

That idea may be one of the clearest bridges between HOSA's past and present. The atmosphere has changed. The scale has changed. The opportunities have multiplied. But the heart of the organization has remained remarkably consistent.



Niha Goel

For Ingle, that consistency is found in the chance to explore healthcare without being boxed into one path. For Coleman, it is in the leadership and tenacity HOSA instills in members at every level. For Goel, it is in community, service, and the way one small interaction can shape a future.

Ingle helped build something she could not yet fully see. Coleman helped widen what it could become. Goel is still discovering where it will take her next.

Across fifty years, the story has never belonged to one generation. It belongs to the members who choose to carry it forward.

For members today, this is not just history to admire. It is a reminder that the opportunities in front of them are part of something much larger than the moment they are in.



HOSA is the bridge; not just between places or years, but between one member choosing to reach out... and another choosing to stay.



HOSA Members Step Into National Healthcare & Policy Spaces

by Ria Mohan, 2025–26 International President

Last month, HOSA members from across the country stepped beyond the familiar settings of classrooms and competitive events and into rooms where healthcare systems are shaped, policies are discussed, and national conversations unfold. Through participation in the AMSUS Annual Meeting and the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) National Policy Seminar, students didn't just observe these spaces, they actively contributed to them.

As I had the privilege of attending both conferences, I was able to witness these moments firsthand, hearing student reflections in real time, watching connections form, and seeing HOSA members step confidently into professional spaces with both purpose and presence.

For Maryland HOSA President Zahrah Shameer, attending AMSUS was a transformative experience that reshaped her understanding of healthcare.

"Attending this conference completely changed my view and opened my eyes to the multifaceted system that is military medicine. While there are medical professionals on the front lines, you also have individuals shaping policy, managing systems, responding to natural disasters, and providing care internationally," Shameer said.

Through panels, conversations, and exposure to leaders in the field, Maryland HOSA members gained insight into a broader healthcare ecosystem, one that extends far beyond clinical care.

One moment that stood out to Shameer reflected a core value of both HOSA and healthcare itself: teamwork.

"A student asked about the role of Physician Assistants and hierarchy in medical operations," she said. "The panelists responded with such grace, emphasizing that every role in healthcare matters. That emphasis on collaboration and teamwork really stayed with me."

That message was reinforced throughout the conference. Members observed that mission readiness in military medicine depends not on hierarchy, but on trust, respect, and the ability of every professional to contribute meaningfully. For Shameer, the experience also clarified her own future path as she connected with trauma physicians who opened her eyes to a path she hadn't seriously considered before.

Beyond career exploration, the conference left a deeper impression about leadership and resilience.

"Hearing about the challenges leaders faced, including imposter syndrome, setbacks, resilience, made me realize what it truly takes to succeed in medicine. My biggest takeaway is that leadership is about humility and readiness. It's about serving the system as a whole, not just the patient in front of you," Shameer said.



Watching HOSA leaders like Shameer move from curiosity to clarity in just a few days. These weren't passive experiences, they were moments of transformation, where students began to see themselves not just as future healthcare professionals, but as contributors to complex systems of care.

While AMSUS offered a lens into healthcare systems, the ACTE National Policy Seminar brought DC HOSA officers directly into conversations shaping the future of education and workforce development.

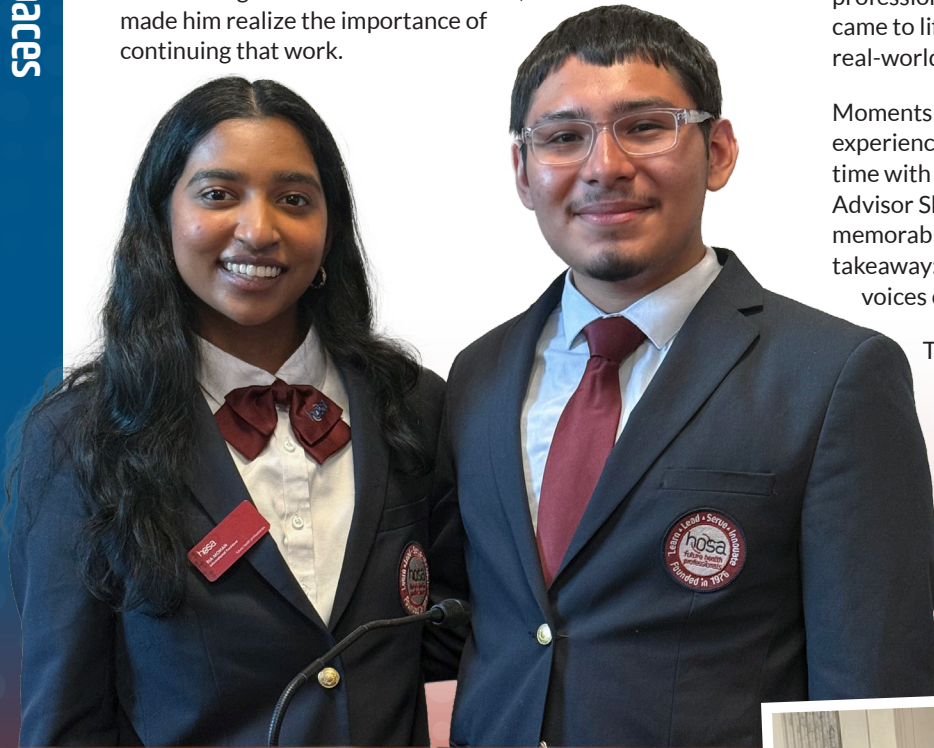
Before attending the seminar, Edwin Amaya, DC HOSA President-Elect, admits he, "had little knowledge about what the seminar was and how critical it is for students like myself." As a student at a STEM-focused high school in Washington, DC, he recognized that opportunities like biotechnology coursework are not accidental, they exist because of sustained advocacy. Seeing the professionals and policymakers behind Career and Technical Student Organizations like HOSA-FHP, made him realize the importance of continuing that work.

One of Amaya's most memorable moments came through a personal interaction with Dr. Sonn Sam, M.D. whose perspective on education left a lasting impression. Through their conversation, Amaya began to see education not just as a system of instruction, but as a pathway for self-discovery. Throughout the seminar, Amaya also observed a powerful sense of alignment among attendees. Despite coming from different backgrounds and sectors, students and professionals shared a common goal of advocating for career and technical education as a meaningful way for students to explore and pursue futures that resonate with them. This collective mission strengthened his desire to pursue psychology and ultimately become a mental health nurse practitioner, a path grounded in the impact he hopes to create.

Amaya shared, "I had the honor of introducing one of the speakers. We also presented a research poster at our booth and filmed content to show how the skills we gain through competitive events continue to apply in real academic and professional settings." In these moments, the mission of HOSA came to life, bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world application.

Moments of mentorship and collaboration further defined the experience. Amaya reflected, "I was especially grateful to spend time with International HOSA President Ria and DC HOSA State Advisor Shreyas, whose guidance made this conference truly memorable." Together, these experiences reinforced a powerful takeaway: when students are given a seat at the table, their voices can meaningfully shape the future of education.

Together, these experiences captured something larger than any single conference.





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HOSA National Round 2025

China HOSA

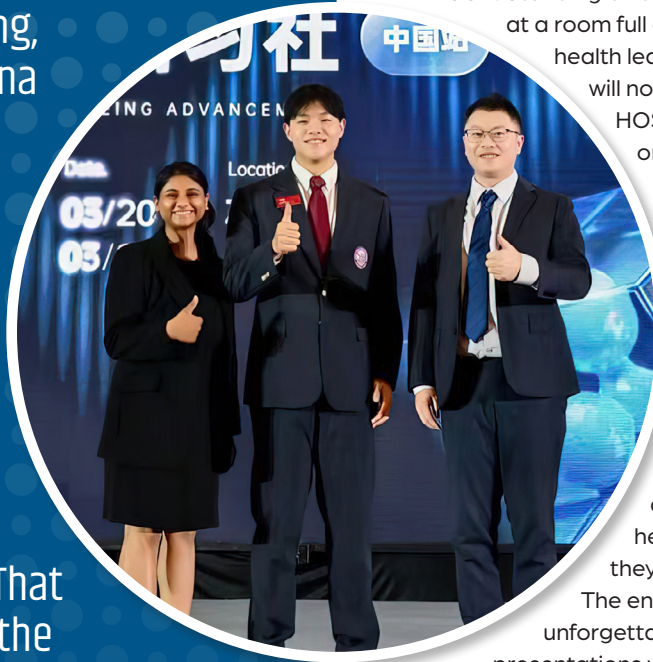
Building the Future of Global Health Leaders

by Matthew Kim, 2025-26 Western Region Vice President



From the moment I arrived at the China HOSA National Leadership Conference, I could tell this experience would be something special.

I was welcomed by Henry Peng, Director of Partnership of China HOSA, and Jimeng Li, Senior Manager of Partnership of China HOSA, whose kindness immediately made me feel at home. They made sure we were settled, gave us time to adjust to the time difference, and gradually introduced us to everything the conference had to offer. That level of care set the tone for the entire event.



L-R: Santina Cherian, Matthew, and Henry

The conference officially began with the opening session, and I had the incredible honor of speaking in front of members, industry professionals, and leaders from across China

HOSA. Standing on that stage, looking out at a room full of passionate future health leaders, was a moment I will not forget. I spoke about HOSA not just as an

organization, but as a legacy. A legacy built by members who inspire one another across generations. As we celebrate HOSA's 50th anniversary, I encouraged everyone in the room to recognize that they are part of that story and that the future of healthcare is something they are already shaping.

The energy in the room was unforgettable. Even though many presentations were in Chinese, the live translation allowed me to stay engaged, and it was amazing to see how connected everyone felt despite language differences.

One of the most meaningful parts of my experience was heading the Leaders' Session. This was a space where current and future chapter leaders came together to talk about what it really means to lead. Instead of focusing on titles or recognition, I shared my perspective on leadership as service. I talked

about my own journey, starting as a 13-year-old who was unsure if I even belonged in HOSA, to where I am now. I wanted members to understand that leadership does not start with confidence. It starts with showing up, taking risks, and being willing to grow. Seeing members reflect, ask questions, and begin to imagine building their own chapters was incredibly rewarding. It felt less like a presentation and more like a shared conversation about what we can build together.

Outside of speaking, I had the chance to connect with so many members and leaders. Some conversations were about expanding HOSA chapters, while others were simply about their goals, interests, and experiences. What stood out to me most was their passion. Not just for leadership, but for making a real difference in their communities. At the same time, I learned so much from them. Their approach to leadership is often rooted in a strong academic foundation, especially in subjects like biology and chemistry, and it was inspiring to see how they connect that knowledge to real-world impact.

The competitive events were another highlight. Many were closely tied to the Chinese curriculum, especially in biology and chemistry, but there were also events like Public Service Announcement, Health Education, and Mental Health Promotion. I had the opportunity to watch several Public Service Announcement presentations, and I was honestly blown away. The creativity, the confidence, and the purpose behind each presentation showed just how much these members care about the messages they are sharing. Beyond competitions, workshops led by industry professionals gave members a glimpse into real-world applications of the concepts and skills they are learning, which added another layer of depth to the conference.



And of course, there was Gala Night, which might have been one of the most fun and unique parts of the entire experience. After days of sessions and competitions, it was a chance for everyone to relax and just enjoy being together. There were performances, from singing to dancing, and the energy in the room completely shifted into celebration. One moment that really stood out to me was seeing members run their own booths, selling handmade items like stickers and DIY toys, with all proceeds going to charities they personally chose. It was such a simple but powerful example of leadership in action.

As the conference came to a close, I had the opportunity to speak one last time during the closing session. It was a moment to reflect on everything that had happened and to recognize the incredible work of the members. I shared more about my own journey and encouraged them to stay curious, continue stepping outside their comfort zones, and take advantage of opportunities like the International Leadership Conference. More than anything, I wanted them to leave knowing that they do not need to have everything figured out right now. What matters most is they have a willingness to learn, to grow, and to serve others.

Looking back, my time at the China HOSA National Leadership Conference was more than just a series of events. It was a reminder of why HOSA matters. It brings people together from different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences, all united by the same goal of improving the health and well-being of others. The passion I saw, the conversations I had, and the connections that were built all reinforced one thing. The future of healthcare is in good hands.



Exploring Careers in Laboratory Medicine

Getting to Know Medical Laboratory Science



Whtley Royal found a career in medical laboratory science (MLS) almost by accident. She had applied to Howard University planning to study healthcare management. When her father flew from Chicago to Washington, D.C. to help her move into her dorm her freshman year, he sat next to a Howard University senior in the Clinical Laboratory Sciences (CLS) program.

“He got her information, and we connected and got along really well,” she said, adding that they’re still in touch. She told Royal about her course of studying, which made her realize she might be in the wrong program.

“I was way more interested in medical laboratory science, and the program’s curriculum, than what I was studying,” she said. “I knew that was going to be a better fit for me.”

At Howard University, the CLS program involved two years of general coursework in things like biology and organic chemistry, after which students apply to be able to continue in the program. In their junior year, students take more intensive classes in fields like immunology, microbiology, chemistry, blood bank, and hematology. Then senior year is rotations out in the field “to get a feel of what each subject you learned is like in the lab setting,” Royal said.

She’s now a medical laboratory scientist at Inova Fairfax Hospital in Fairfax, Va., working in their blood bank. Right now, at 22 years old, she’s focused on being successful in her first laboratory job, but she has an eye on a master’s degree down the line.

For students considering MLS, Royal said that the coursework is time consuming but worth it, because there are so many career potentials when you graduate, and those kinds of jobs are almost certainly going to always be in demand.

She also wants them to know that learning doesn’t stop once you get your degree. “Healthcare and medicine are forever evolving. You’ll always be learning something with no new plateau,” she said.

Royal also stresses that it’s not a patient-facing job, which means it might be ideal or not, depending on each kind of scientist and what work environment they prefer. But even in the lab, she knows her work plays a vital role in healthcare, even if she doesn’t interact with the people whose tests she is running, with the hope of bringing them a diagnosis. “We truly do make a difference for patients,” she said.

What is Clinical Laboratory Science?

In this field, professionals work in a laboratory to run critical tests that help clinicians with diagnosis and treatment of a variety of health and medication conditions. You learn to collect and analyze samples, operate laboratory machines and interpret results, with testing largely focused on microbiology, chemistry, hematology, immunology and blood bank.

Why Choose Clinical Laboratory Science?

- You have a passion for science or healthcare.
- You are looking for job stability and career opportunities — the field is not well known but professionals are in demand, so jobs are open frequently!
- You want to make a difference in helping diagnose patients.

Careers in Laboratory Medicine

- Research
- Professional Services
- Forensics
- Humanitarian
- Health Care Administration
- Hospital & Clinic Labs
- Information Technology
- Academia
- Biotechnology
- Industry

Want to learn more? The Association for Diagnostics & Laboratory Medicine (ADLM) is dedicated to increasing awareness and understanding of careers in medical laboratory science through its High School Speaker Series. Through this school-based program, which includes things like classroom presentations, science fairs, and career events, students learn about laboratory medicine and the many roles it plays in modern healthcare. If you are interested in learning more or requesting a visit to your school, please contact **Caitlin Mone** at cmone@myadlm.org.



Minds at Work:

How HOSA Postsecondary/Collegiate Members Are Shaping the Future of Medicine

by **Gowthamm Mandala**

2025-26 International Postsecondary/Collegiate Board Representative and **Megan Lloren**,

2025-26 International Postsecondary/Collegiate Vice-President

Research does not begin in a graduate program or a professional lab. For many HOSA Postsecondary/Collegiate (PS/C) members, it starts now, in emergency vehicles, campus laboratories, and genomics pipelines running late into the night. Across the world, PS/C members are doing work that contributes meaningfully to the future of medicine. This edition spotlights three of them, each representing a different path into research, and each with something to say to members who are still considering whether to take the first step.

Grace Bellamy is a senior at William & Mary majoring in Biology on a pre-dental track, bringing eight years of HOSA involvement at both the chapter and state level. Her research zeroes in on the evolutionary relationships between yeast strains, with a particular focus on one strain isolated right in William & Mary's own College Woods.

To study these strains, Bellamy analyzes genomic data using a pipeline of four computational tools. BWA, Burrows-Wheeler Aligner, reassembles millions of tiny DNA fragments by matching each piece against a known reference genome, essentially solving an enormous genetic puzzle at high speed. SAMtools, Sequence Alignment/Map Tools, then organizes and cleans up the resulting data, sorting and filtering it into something structured and workable. GATK, Genome Analysis Toolkit, acts as the detective, comparing her yeast strain's DNA against the reference and pinpointing exactly where the two differ, distinguishing true biological variation from sequencing errors. Finally, R, a programming language built for statistics and data visualization, pulls it all together, allowing Bellamy to build evolutionary family trees, run statistical tests, and answer the central question driving her work: how have these yeast strains adapted to different environments over time?

What drew her to dry lab work was the ability to find patterns that are not visible to the naked eye.

"There is something exciting about sitting down with a dataset and uncovering something that no one could have seen otherwise," she said. "It completely changes how you think about biological questions."

For Bellamy, that curiosity connects directly to her interest in health science. Understanding genetic variation, she explains, is foundational to research in emerging diseases and personalized medicine.

As she wraps up the project, she is most eager to learn which lineage her Williamsburg strain belongs to. This particular strain is a yeast sample that Bellamy personally collected from the woods on William & Mary's campus, making it a locally sourced, previously unstudied microorganism. Identifying its lineage would reveal where it sits on the broader yeast family tree, offering clues about how it evolved and how it may differ from strains found anywhere else in the world.

"William and Mary has such a rich history, and contributing to that story through science feels meaningful," she said. She hopes this kind of research will eventually inform how genetic factors are identified in disease, and how that knowledge translates to better patient outcomes.

To members thinking about the Research Forum in 2027 and beyond, Bellamy keeps it straightforward. "Go for it, even if you do not feel fully ready. Research is always evolving, and you grow so much just by starting and putting yourself out there."

Riya Talati, Immediate Past President of Indiana HOSA, is a sophomore at the University of Southern Indiana studying Biology and Psychology on a pre-medical track. Her goal is to pursue pediatric emergency medicine, and she is already living close to that world. Talati works as a certified Emergency Medical Technician, responding to emergencies, monitoring patients, supporting basic life support, and communicating critical information to hospital teams at the end of each transport.

She found her way into clinical work through a volunteer program at Ascension St. Vincent Hospital, an opportunity she initially discovered through HOSA. After two years in the emergency department, nurses encouraged her to pursue EMT certification. She enrolled in a program at the start of college and has been working in the field since.

"My advice is to get involved early and build relationships with healthcare professionals," she said. "Those connections open doors and help you figure out what you are actually passionate about."

One moment has stayed with her more than most. During a transport, she worked with a child being taken to a mental health facility who was frightened and overwhelmed. Over the course of the ride, she talked with him about things that brought him comfort and explained what to expect when they arrived.

"I could see his heart rate and blood pressure start to come down," she recalled. "Even through his tears, he started to smile. When we arrived, he kept thanking us for making him feel seen." That moment reinforced something she carries into every shift: compassion and presence are clinical tools.

Through her work, Talati has also noticed a pattern that she believes deserves more attention. Many of her patients, particularly in rural and low-income areas, arrive in crisis after delaying care due to financial barriers.

"A lot of these emergencies could have been prevented with access to primary care," she said. "That gap is something the healthcare system needs to take seriously."

Alicia Roice is a fourth-year pre-medical student studying Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology Major at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Roice's HOSA journey spans over eight years, beginning her freshman year of high school, where she eventually served as local chapter president at Mountain House High School before going on to serve as local chapter president at UCLA. She works within the Hsiao Lab under PhD candidate Celine Son, conducting research on how subtype-specific microbial depletion affects neuronal activation in the nucleus of the solitary tract, a region of the brainstem involved in gut-brain communication. Her work is part of the MIMG Path 2 cohort, and she is a co-author on a paper currently accepted for publication at Nature Communications.

Her day-to-day work involves a range of wet lab techniques, from cryosectioning and immunohistochemistry staining of neuronal cells, to cell counting and confocal microscopy.

"Every technique teaches you something new about how to ask a question carefully," she said. "Wet lab work is as much about precision and patience as it is about curiosity."

Her research sits at the intersection of microbiology, neuroscience, and behavioral analysis, exploring how the microbiome influences the brain in ways that are only beginning to be understood.

For Roice, the most exciting part of the work is how much remains unknown. "We are still in the early stages of understanding how gut bacteria shape neurological function," she said. "The questions feel wide open, and that is what keeps me motivated." She sees her research as laying groundwork for future studies in areas like appetite regulation, mental health, and chronic disease.

"Do not wait until your project feels finished or perfect," she said. "Submitting pushes you to articulate your work clearly and think critically about what you have done. That process alone is worth it."

Bellamy, Talati, and Roice came to their work through different paths, but share one thing in common: they started before they felt ready.

Whether you are working in a clinical setting, running gels in a wet lab, or analyzing genomic data from a laptop, your work has a place in the HOSA Research Forum. While the 2026 deadline is closed, abstracts are accepted from members across all areas of health science; and submitting is one of the most direct ways to connect your current experience to the broader research community.

To listen to other PS/C members present their amazing research at the inaugural presentation, join us at the 2026 International Leadership Conference (ILC) on June 18th from 3:30 to 4:30pm.





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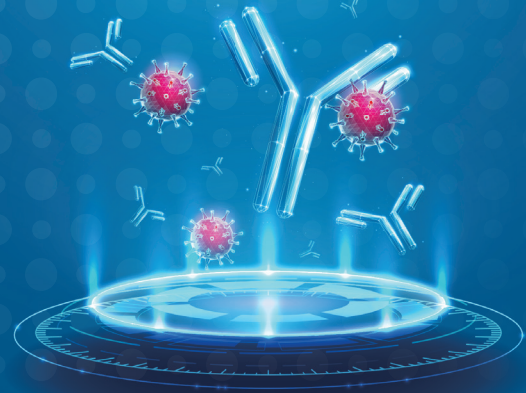


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CAR-T Therapy: The New Frontier

by Megan Lloren, 2025–26 Postsecondary/Collegiate Vice President



Over the past 250 years, there have been such groundbreaking discoveries in the field of cancer therapies, but has largely centered on surgical excision, chemotherapy, and radiation.

These innovations have saved countless lives, but at the cost of attacking the body alongside the disease. Instead of medicine meant to heal, cancer treatment often compromises healthy cells in the process and induces systemic toxicity, resulting in a decline in quality of life. This paradox

made scientists ask a question: can treatment be personalized to affect *only* the cancer?

Those very same scientists developed a solution: Chimeric Antigen Receptor T (CAR-T) cell therapy. Manpreet Bariana Ph.D, has spent her post-doctorate career researching this treatment frontier in the lab of Johannes Zakrzewski, M.D., at the Center for Discovery and Innovation in Hackensack Meridian Health.

"T cell therapy is a part of immunotherapy where you use your own body's immune system to act against a disease," Bariana noted. "You take the patient's cells, modify them genetically outside the body, and re-inject them to act against the cancer cells, so it finds and kills them."

In blood cancers, like leukemia and lymphoma, the results have shown to induce full remission in patients. These advancements in immunotherapy inform implications that stretch well beyond just the blood, but to solid tumors and autoimmune diseases as well. For Postsecondary/Collegiate (PS/C) HOSA member, Sahana Suresh from East Carolina University, this innovation is inspirational.

"Advancements like CAR-T cell therapy are incredibly exciting to me because they show how research can translate into real treatments for patients," Suresh shared.

However, in spite of the promising results, Bariana also recognizes its limitations, especially as it can only be done ex-vivo and modified in a lab. Because the therapy is built from a patient's own cell line, it cannot be manufactured in bulk or



distributed like common chemotherapeutics. These additional steps exacerbate the cost, making therapy far more expensive and less accessible to patients.

At the clinical level, these barriers also extend to the scalability of CAR-T therapy. Not every patient qualifies, with eligibility limited to patients with relapsed or refractory disease. Some examples include refractory B-cell Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL). As of now, CAR-T therapy is the last option for those who have already failed the conventional methods. For such a promising modality, its limited accessibility often leads to difficult conversations between physicians and patients.

"It's frustrating at first, knowing that I can't offer it [CAR-T therapy] to them," pediatric hematologist-oncologist Ashley Varkey, D.O. reflects. "But also, it can be a good thing because I know that the [kids] have not progressed to a more advanced stage."

For researchers like Bariana, these contradictions are what pushes innovation forward. "The goal is to get to a point where these therapies are not the last resort—they should be an option much earlier, when patients have more strength to fight," she said. "We're not there yet, but every study brings us closer."

Varkey's reflection captures the dual-edged nature of modern medicine as a whole. Innovation is progress, but so are its limits. CAR-T cell therapy represents the shift in how medicine approaches disease, treating the person and not just the body. Science is advancing faster than society ever saw coming. The harder question now is not whether or not the treatments work, but whether the patients that need them will be able to access it and whether the researchers racing toward that answer will get there in time.

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Sahana Suresh

Beyond Specialization: The Power of Family Medicine

by **Ria Mohan**, 2025–26 HOSA International President

The healthcare system is often defined by specialization: a dentist for oral hygiene, an optometrist for vision care, and so on. However, family medicine stands out because it focuses on the whole body and total wellbeing of the patients within the communities they serve. Family medicine physicians are the first point of care, the long-term guide, and the trusted voice in a patient's healthcare journey.



Christine Camacho, MD

At the national level, few understand the evolving role of family medicine better than Karen Mitchell, MD, FAAFP, Vice President, National Residency & Academic Partnerships of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Dr. Mitchell works closely with students and residents as they navigate pathways into the family medicine specialty. From her perspective, family medicine is not only foundational to the healthcare system, but also one of its most dynamic and forward-moving fields.



Karen Mitchell, MD, FAAFP

To Dr. Mitchell, what makes family medicine especially compelling is its ability to center entirely on people.

Unlike specialties that focus on a single organ or condition, family physicians become the “go-to” doctors for everyday health, and often serve as the very first point of contact in

a patient's care. Over time, that role evolves into something much deeper. Family physicians can care for multiple generations within the same family—an experience that reflects the continuity and trust unique to this specialty.

That same breadth extends into the structure of the career itself. Family physicians can shape their practice in ways that align with their interests, whether that means working in urgent care, exploring sports medicine, engaging in public health, or addressing community-wide challenges. Yet alongside that flexibility is a consistent mission: preventing illness before it begins and helping patients stay healthy over time.

Looking ahead, Dr. Mitchell sees family medicine continuing to anchor the healthcare system, especially as technology and innovation reshape the field. Advances in artificial intelligence are already helping reduce administrative burdens, allowing physicians to spend more time focusing on patients rather than paperwork. At the same time, there is a growing emphasis on preventative care and the integration of mental health into primary care settings, reinforcing the holistic nature of the specialty.

She encourages students to seek exposure early. Whether through shadowing, volunteering at community health events, or developing communication and teamwork skills, the path into family medicine begins with understanding people.

For Christine Camacho, MD, a family physician at UT Health San Antonio and a HOSA alum, the defining feature of the specialty is the depth of relationships it allows physicians to build.

Her journey into family medicine began with uncertainty. Initially drawn to fields like pediatrics, she quickly realized during her clinical rotations that something was missing. While she loved working with children, she found herself missing the relationships she had formed with adult patients. Family medicine offered a solution that felt both natural and meaningful: the ability to care for individuals at every stage of life.

One moment in her career captures this impact clearly. A long-term patient came to her after discovering a thyroid nodule, uncertain about whether to pursue surgery. Unable to receive a definitive answer elsewhere, the patient turned to Dr. Camacho for guidance, trusting her judgment completely. After carefully reviewing the case and discussing the options, Dr. Camacho recommended removal. The patient followed through, and the nodule was later found to be cancerous. That decision, grounded in trust, ultimately changed the course of the patient's life.

"Strong communication skills are really essential for family physicians, because we have to explain a lot of complex info in a way that helps patients understand their health," Dr. Camacho explained.

For Zachary Bittinger, MD, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at The Ohio State University College of Medicine, family medicine represents not only a specialty, but a lifestyle and a mindset.

Interestingly, his path to family medicine began with hesitation. Early in his training, he viewed the field as limited, even monotonous. It was not until he experienced it firsthand, learning from a physician deeply embedded in their community, that his perspective shifted. He saw a model of care that was dynamic, relational, and deeply rooted in purpose.

What stood out most was the ability to care for a wide range of patients within a single day, from infants to older adults, while maintaining meaningful, long-term relationships with each. This breadth did not dilute the experience, it enriched it. It allowed him to combine the aspects of medicine he enjoyed most while avoiding the constraints of narrowing his focus too early.

Beyond clinical care, Dr. Bittinger emphasizes the flexibility that family medicine provides. The specialty opens doors not only within medicine, such as sports medicine or procedural work, but also beyond it, including teaching, advocacy, and efforts to improve healthcare systems. It allows physicians to shape careers that align with both their professional goals and their personal lives.

At the core of his philosophy is a simple but powerful idea: usefulness. He describes family physicians as trusted sources of health information, individuals patients can turn to with confidence across a wide range of concerns. That role, however, comes with responsibility. Family physicians are often present during some of the most difficult moments in a patient's life, requiring resilience, empathy, and the ability to remain fully present while navigating complex emotional and clinical challenges.

For HOSA members considering this path, his advice extends beyond academics. He encourages them to reflect on what they want their lives to look like, not just their careers. Family medicine, he notes, offers the flexibility to build a practice that aligns with those priorities while still making a profound impact. At the same time, he emphasizes the importance of maintaining personal well-being throughout the journey, recognizing that the path to becoming a physician is long and demanding, but ultimately rewarding.

Ultimately, family medicine is often described as broad, but its true strength lies in how it brings together depth, continuity, and purpose. From shaping national healthcare systems to guiding individual patient decisions and building lifelong relationships, family physicians embody what it means to care not just for disease, but for people.

"HOSA members should reflect on what they want their lives to look like, not just their careers. Family medicine offers the flexibility to build a practice that aligns with those priorities while still making a profound impact. At the same time, it is important to maintain personal well-being throughout the journey, because the path to becoming a physician is long and demanding, yet ultimately rewarding."

— Zachary Bittinger, MD



Zachary Bittinger, MD



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Physician Advocacy: Redefining the Professional Obligation

by David Gonzalez, 2025-26 Secondary Board Representative

In the modern medical landscape, the role of the doctor is undergoing a profound shift from a purely biomedical focus to one that encompasses social responsibility. While the 20th century was defined by an overconfidence in biomedicine as the universal solution, there is a growing recognition that clinical care alone cannot fix the systemic issues plaguing patient health.

Physician advocacy is now defined as a specific action taken by a physician to promote the social, economic, educational, and political changes that reduce suffering and threats to health. Despite being first recognized by organizations like the American Medical Association as a core responsibility for physicians since 2001, it remains an under-practiced pillar of the profession.

Mark Earnest, MD, PhD, and Shale Wong, MD, MSPH, have established themselves as global leaders in the effort to transform physician advocacy from an abstract ideal into an integrated, core component of the modern medical curriculum. Having spent their distinguished careers at the University of Colorado Anschutz School of Medicine, they have pioneered programs that challenge the traditional boundaries of medical education. Together, they have worked to develop community-based service learning and advocacy initiatives, ensuring that future physicians view social responsibility not as an elective, but as a fundamental pillar of practicing medicine.



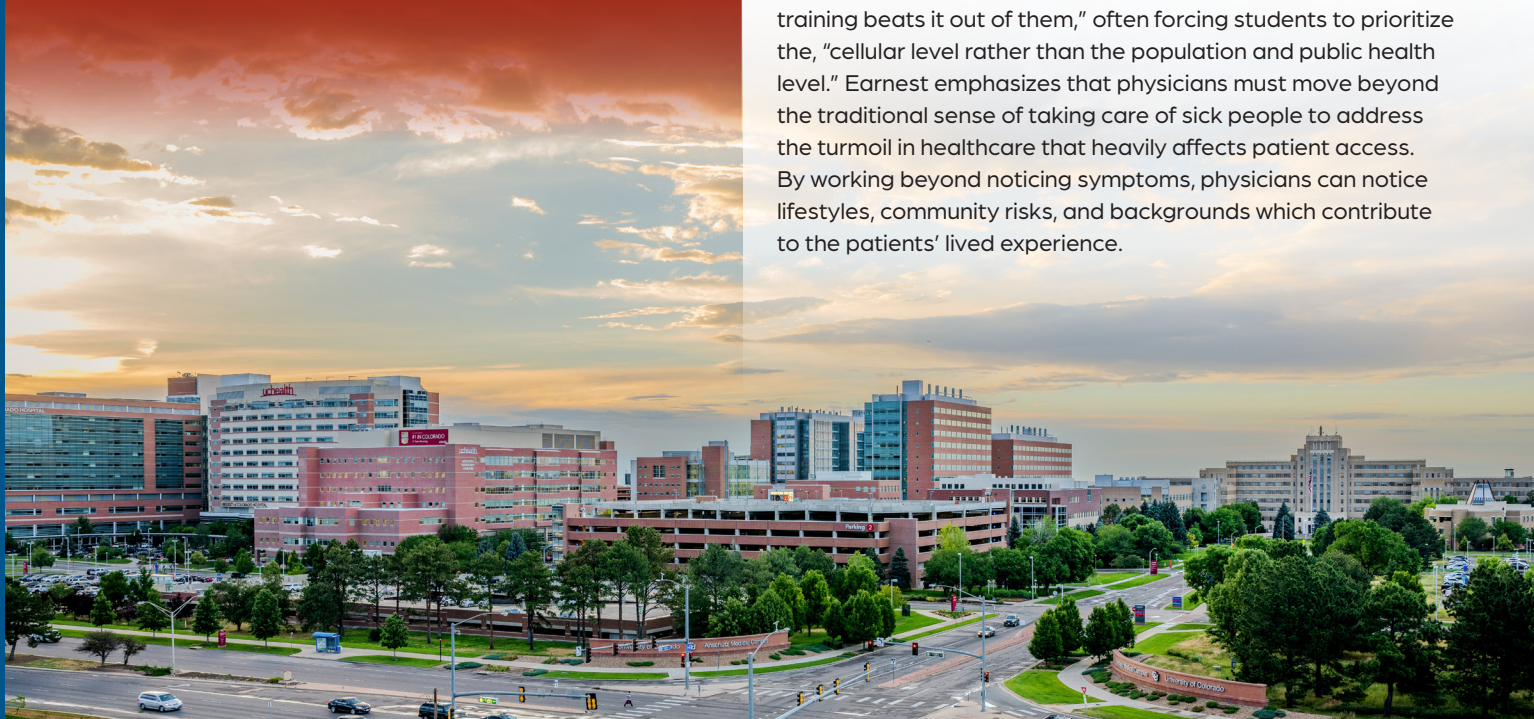
Mark Earnest, MD, PhD



Shale Wong, MD, MSPH

For many practitioners, the path to this work begins with what Earnest calls being an “accidental advocate.” He suggests that students should, “build the habit of investigating the social determinants of health,” early in their training, even when faced with criticism from physicians, who may consider this form of patient care as not included in the scope of practice for a physician.

This shift in mindset is necessary because, as Wong describes, while students are originally drawn to these solutions, “medical training beats it out of them,” often forcing students to prioritize the, “cellular level rather than the population and public health level.” Earnest emphasizes that physicians must move beyond the traditional sense of taking care of sick people to address the turmoil in healthcare that heavily affects patient access. By working beyond noticing symptoms, physicians can notice lifestyles, community risks, and backgrounds which contribute to the patients’ lived experience.



One of the primary hurdles for future health professionals is the belief that medical training is too intense to allow for community involvement. However, Earnest advises that while the profession rewards overwork, “you do not have to respond to every impulse.” Instead, he encourages finding a balance that leaves a provider, “energized walking in and energized walking out.”

The unique power of the physician advocate lies in their ability to combine, “data and stories.” Because physicians maintain a high level of public trust and, as Wong asserts, experience, “ [a] degree of intimacy and vulnerability” with families that is unlike any other profession, they are uniquely positioned to influence policy. As Earnest notes, “sometimes performing at the highest level is to be okay with growth.” Growing in accepting failure, recognizing that asking questions places you in the right direction, and redefining what expectations you hold for yourself. He reminds HOSA members that, “your story has meaning, and having the courage to tell your own story and use your own voice is powerful.”

Ultimately, successful advocacy requires a long-term commitment and a willingness to embrace the chaotic nature of social change. Earnest advises HOSA members to “pick something you care about” and to remember that “no success is solo,” requiring friends and allies united by a common mission. He continues, that although it can be “very uncomfortable” to sit with suffering when the answer is unknown, a physician’s investment of time and expertise is a vital tool for structural improvement.

As Wong concludes, “don’t let anyone tell you that your dream is not worth it anymore ... being able to care for people and be there for people is one of the most gratifying and satisfying kinds of work.”

For HOSA members, physician advocacy does not have to be constrained to the beginning of one’s career. The evolution of the medical profession demands a new definition of clinical excellence—where a professional’s reach goes beyond that of the specific patient, and to the structural heart of the community.

HOSA members can begin their journey by recognizing that leadership is not a title to be earned later, but a practice to be cultivated today. Advocacy starts with the simple, yet radical, act of asking why: investigating why certain populations face higher barriers to care and why zip codes often predict health outcomes more accurately than genetic codes. By engaging in community service, participating in health policy debate, and refining the art of elevating others’ stories, HOSA members can cultivate the skills needed to be active architects of the future of medicine.

Ultimately, the work of systemic healing belongs to every member of the healthcare team; by embracing this responsibility now, HOSA members ensure that the next generation of care is defined not by the limitations of the current landscape, but by the strength of collective voice and the depth of social commitment.





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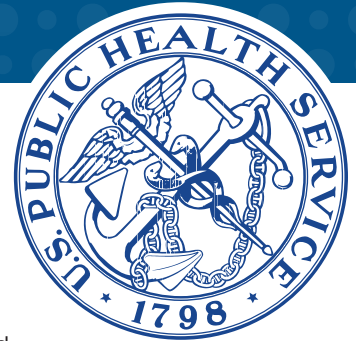
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Dirt to Dinner: In the Classroom

Minnesota HOSA: Future Health Professionals, Camp Ripley

by CDR Catherine Beaucham, PhD, CIH, REHS, and LCDR Sana A. Elassar



On December 5, 2025, the vibrant atmosphere of Camp Ripley buzzed with excitement as LCDR Sana A. Elassar (Environmental Health Officer) and LCDR Anthony Ladner (Pharmacist) represented the U. S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps with pride and distinction at the Minnesota (MN) HOSA Future Health Professionals event. Invited by MN HOSA to showcase the dynamic world of the USPHS Commissioned Corps, these Public Health Service (PHS) officers set up an engaging Career Exploration booth that drew curious minds from all corners of the event.

With a captivating PowerPoint presentation displayed on two screens, the booth came alive with striking images of the USPHS Commissioned Corps flag and seal, igniting spirited conversations among the 87 enthusiastic student participants. The slideshow running on a continuous loop, served as a visual gateway into the diverse career opportunities within the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

Adding to the interactive experience, LCDR Elassar and LCDR Ladner showcased various components of the USPHS Commissioned Corps uniform by displaying them at the booth. They also sweetened the deal by providing delicious snacks, creating a welcoming atmosphere to encourage attendees to linger and learn.

As the day unfolded, many eager students desired to delve deeper into the USPHS Commissioned Corps by asking questions about joining the service; learning about career opportunities available in the USPHS Commissioned Corps; and understanding pay structures, commitment requirements, and how the USPHS Commissioned Corps compares to its sister services. The high student interest highlights the event's success in inspiring the next generation of health professionals and should be duplicated across the nation at other HOSA events.

U. S. Public Health Service Career Exploration at Camp Ripley



LCDR Anthony Ladner stands behind an educational display table showcasing the history, uniforms, and tools of the USPHS Commissioned Corps during the Minnesota HOSA: Future Health Professionals career exploration event

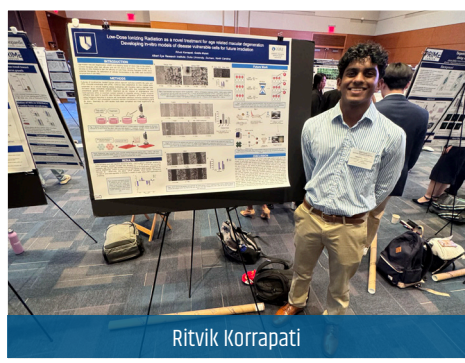
Living Out the HOSA Triangle, Part Three of Three: Care Starts With Community

by Jeet Sridhar, 2025-26 President-Elect

There is a moment that many HOSA members know well. Walking into a leadership conference surrounded by strangers, uncertain of where they belong, and then a conversation begins, and something shifts. The realization settles in that the ambitions, anxieties, and commitment to healthcare are shared. That moment is not incidental. It is the third pillar of the HOSA Triangle coming to life.



The HOSA Triangle represents physical, mental, and social health, three pillars that must work in harmony to support both those served and those preparing to serve. While physical health is often the most visible and mental health the most discussed, social well-being is the pillar that quietly holds the other two together. As this three-part series comes to a close, one truth ties all three pillars together: social connection is not an accessory to achievement, but rather is a foundation for belonging in healthcare.



Ritvik Korrapati

Ritvik Korrapati knows this not as a theory but as a lived experience. As a former chapter president of the River Bluff High School HOSA chapter in South Carolina, he built a culture defined less by competition rankings and

more by genuine belonging. Members showed up for each other through late-night practice rounds, long study sessions before events, and the quiet moments when encouragement mattered more than strategy.

“HOSA taught me that the strongest leaders are the ones who make others feel seen,” Korrapati reflects. “That doesn’t stop being true in a clinical setting.”

Now as an alumni HOSA member, and a pre-medicine student at Duke University, Korrapati carries that foundation with him, continuing to pioneer the HOSA mission in a new environment. The skills that made him an effective chapter president, listening with intention, building trust, showing up consistently, are the same skills he is bringing into medicine.

“Community-building is not something you outgrow but something you bring with you,” he said. The investment in belonging was never separate from professional preparation. It was the preparation.

His experience speaks to something larger. Studies have found that people with stronger social ties experience lower levels of stress and better overall health outcomes, comparable to well-established health factors like smoking and physical activity (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Social support helps buffer the body’s response to stress, and for students navigating rigorous academics, competitive events, and the weight of a healthcare calling, peer networks are a lifeline. In a profession built entirely on human connection, the ability to sustain meaningful relationships is itself a clinical skill.

Healthcare has never been a solo pursuit. Emergency rooms run on coordination. Clinics run on trust. The habits formed today, checking in on a teammate before a competition, reaching out to a mentor when a path feels uncertain, showing up even when the week has been heavy, are the same habits that will define future professionals. Community is not separate from clinical preparation. It is part of it.

That same sense of belonging extends beyond the student experience. Kaitlyn Jollimore, State Advisor for New Hampshire (NH) HOSA, represents a new generation of leadership shaped by years of connection within the organization itself. Having been involved in NH HOSA since her sophomore year of high school, stepping into the advisor role was not a leap into the unknown, but a natural continuation of a journey she had been building for years.



Kaitlyn Jollimore
NH HOSA State Advisor

As one of the youngest state advisors in HOSA’s history, Jollimore has approached leadership with a clear focus: creating an environment where others feel confident, supported, and empowered to lead. Rather than centering leadership on authority, she has prioritized trust, collaboration, and shared ownership within her officer team.

That investment in people has defined her success. Her state officer team brought energy, initiative, and a strong sense of purpose to their work, helping to shape a State Leadership Conference that reflected not just careful planning, but genuine connection.

"I've been fortunate to work with a group that is incredibly motivated and supportive of one another," Jollimore shared. "When people feel confident in their roles and supported by those around them, it changes what a team is capable of achieving."

Her experience reinforces a broader truth within HOSA: belonging is not something that happens by chance, but something built intentionally through leadership that values people first. The environments created today, rooted in encouragement, trust, and shared growth, are the same environments that future healthcare professionals will carry into their careers.

Social well-being does not build itself. It requires the same intentionality brought to studying for an exam or preparing for a competitive event. Introducing oneself to a new face at a HOSA event, reaching out to a mentor who shaped the path, creating chapter rituals that exist purely to strengthen bonds between members, these small, consistent choices accumulate into a network that sustains through the hardest seasons of the journey.

The HOSA Triangle is now complete. What this series has made clear, across three pillars and three editions, is that the healthcare professionals the world needs most are not simply the most knowledgeable or the most driven. They are the ones who know how to belong, how to build trust, and how to show up for the people beside them. Physical health, mental health, and social well-being are not three separate goals to check off. They are three dimensions of a life lived in service, and a career built to last.

HOSA has always been the place where that formation begins. Now, let's redefine the standard and carry it forward.

"When people feel confident in their roles and supported by those around them, it changes what a team is capable of achieving."

—Kaitlyn Jollimore



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The Power of Representation in Healthcare Leadership

by **Gowthamm Mandala**, 2025–26 International Postsecondary/Collegiate Board Representative

In healthcare, who shows up matters just as much as what they know. When patients see providers who reflect their communities—trust grows. When students see leaders who share their background, careers once out of reach come into view. Across HOSA chapters and leadership networks nationwide, that lesson is not theoretical. It is lived, and it is shaping the next generation of healthcare professionals.

For Sarthak Kamble, a member of C4 Columbus Area Career Connections, the moment was quiet but significant. Seeing someone from his community in a healthcare leadership role gave him something difficult to quantify but impossible to ignore.

"It felt like we, as a community, have accomplished something," he said. "It made me feel proud."

That pride is tied directly to purpose. After watching family members battle cancer and learning how late-stage detection devastates outcomes in India, Kamble set his sights on oncology. "I want to solve that problem," he said.

HOSA gave him the space to act on that drive. His Health Education project on student burnout taught him that healthcare is about more than clinical skill; it is about presence and connection.

"HOSA is what made me realize that I needed to be in the healthcare field," Kamble said.

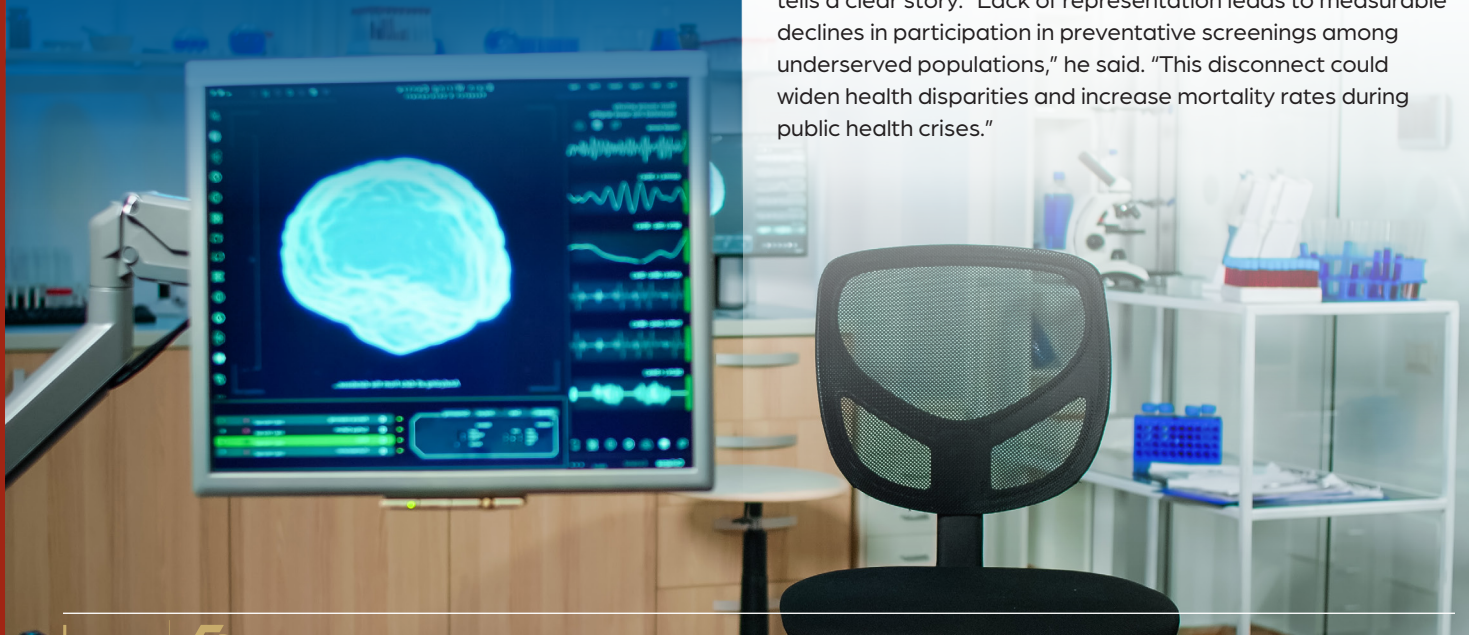
Arjun Keshava, HOSA Alumni Representative on the HOSA Board of Directors, offers a broader lens. Representation, he argues, is not symbolic; it is strategic.

"Public health relies on the trust of the people served, making representation in any form important in establishing mutual understanding between leadership and the community," he said. "Without this representation, the gap between leadership and the public can hinder the effectiveness of essential health initiatives."

The consequences of a lack of representation show up in real ways: delayed diagnoses, lower rates of preventive care, and disengaged communities altogether. For Keshava, the data tells a clear story. "Lack of representation leads to measurable declines in participation in preventative screenings among underserved populations," he said. "This disconnect could widen health disparities and increase mortality rates during public health crises."



Sarthak Kamble



For Keshava, organizations like HOSA are essential infrastructure. They reach students before anyone has told them who they can or cannot be in healthcare.

"HOSA provides opportunities for passionate students to drive change through early exposure to health careers and leadership roles," he said. "By investing in students today, HOSA ensures that the next generation of leadership is prepared to meet the needs of all communities."

Nebraska HOSA State President Lucyana Munoz has seen that transformation up close. Her approach to inclusive leadership is less about policy and more about presence. At the State Leadership Conference, she made a habit of stopping to check in with members who looked nervous before their events, asking simple questions and signaling that their experience mattered.

"If a member is comfortable, they are much more likely to trust you as a leader," she said. "Some go from being unsure of their role to speaking up for themselves and for those around them."

The Nebraska state team embodied that philosophy in its own makeup, with officers from different ethnicities, religions, and parts of the state, each bringing a distinct perspective. "Every single one of us brought different ideas for members like us to be able to grow as leaders," Munoz said.

For her, growing representation means reaching further into rural chapters, underconnected communities, and spaces HOSA has not yet fully served. "At the local level, it is about being present in the community. At the state level, it is about making connections that bring more members from all over," she said.

Representation in healthcare is not a trend. It is an investment in trust, in outcomes, and in the belief that every community deserves a provider who understands their story.

For Kamble, the message to younger students is straightforward, "Healthcare leadership is worth it. Helping someone fighting through something like cancer is worth it."

For Keshava, a student from an underrepresented background carries a particular kind of strength. "Since public health is an expansive field, I would suggest identifying a specific area of interest that aligns with your passions and goals," he said. "Seeking mentorship from those who have navigated similar paths will provide the guidance necessary to move your career in the right direction."

For Munoz, the path forward is built one connection at a time, "Anyone can be a healthcare leader as long as they are passionate and have empathy."

HOSA is not waiting for the healthcare workforce to change on its own. It is building the leaders who will change it, and know what it means to serve the communities they come from. That is not just representation; that is the future of healthcare.



"HOSA provides opportunities for passionate students to drive change through early exposure to health careers and leadership roles. By investing in students today, HOSA ensures that the next generation of leadership is prepared to meet the needs of all communities."

—Arjun Keshava



"Anyone can be a healthcare leader as long as they are passionate and have empathy."

—Lucyana Munoz

Beyond the Break: Turning Summer Into Purpose and Possibility

by **Shriya Kunam**, Eastern Region Vice President

For many students, summer arrives as a pause from the demands of the academic year. It offers relief from assignments, exams, and busy schedules. For members of HOSA-Future Health Professionals, summer can become something much more significant. It can become a turning point.

Across the country, HOSA members are beginning to see these months not simply as time off, but as time that can be shaped with intention. When approached thoughtfully, summer becomes an opportunity to step beyond the classroom and engage directly with the fields they hope to pursue. In those experiences, members gain not only skills, but also clarity about their goals and their place in healthcare.

Rosalyn Kuck, junior in high school and recently elected Idaho HOSA's State Region III Vice President, that sense of direction began with a long-standing interest in medicine. Having grown up around healthcare through her mother's work as a trauma nurse, Kuck long imagined a future in medicine, however, imagining a career and experiencing it firsthand are two very different things. As she approached the end of her sophomore year, she began to see summer as an opportunity to step into the environment she had only engaged with from a distance.

What followed was a series of small, intentional steps. Kuck asked questions, reached out to her network, and looked for opportunities close to home. Through a combination of outreach and independent research, she secured a hospital volunteer position and became involved in sports medicine.

Reflecting on her decision, Kuck shared, "I just felt really excited to dive in and actually see what it's like to be in a clinical setting."

"I just felt really excited to dive in and actually see what it's like to be in a clinical setting. The biggest skill that I learned was the ability to connect with people."—Rosalyn Kuck



Some of her opportunities came through family, while others came through HOSA and her school community.

"I had a friend who was in HOSA with me who had done it the year prior," Kuck said. "So I kind of asked him some questions about it."

Once inside the hospital, Kuck began to understand healthcare in a way that extended far beyond textbooks.

"The biggest skill that I learned was the ability to connect with people," Kuck explained.

Through these interactions, she began to see patients as individuals with stories, not just cases.

While Kuck explored healthcare through direct patient interaction, Himakshi Patel, incoming South Carolina HOSA State President and first-year student at the University of South Carolina, approached her summer from a broader perspective focused on public health and advocacy. Through a HOSA connection, Patel was introduced to an opportunity with [CADCA](#), (originally known as Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America) where she was selected as one of ten students nationwide to participate in a specialized cohort.

Patel's work focused on substance abuse prevention in her community, where she analyzed data and contributed a youth perspective.

Through this experience, Patel worked alongside professionals who engage with these issues daily, gaining insight beyond what a classroom can provide.

"We were surrounded with people who do this for a living," Patel said. "Being able to go back and forth and share perspectives was really important."

These experiences helped Patel recognize that healthcare extends beyond treatment and into prevention, environment, and policy.

Although Kuck and Patel took different paths, their experiences reflect a shared mindset. Both approached their summers with intention. They asked questions, took initiative, and remained open to learning.

Their stories highlight an important idea. Meaningful summers are not defined by access or circumstance, but by the effort students put into exploring their interests.

One of the most effective strategies is simply reaching out. Cold-emailing healthcare professionals, professors, or local organizations may feel intimidating, but it is one of the most valuable tools available.

As Kuck explained, "having that confidence and just being able to reach out" builds confidence and experience.

HOSA members should also take advantage of the network around them. HOSA provides access to peers, advisors, and

mentors who have navigated similar paths, and conversations with others can reveal lesser known opportunities. Patel's experience began with a single connection within HOSA, showing how powerful that network can be.

"Don't look at your summer as a resume builder," Patel advised. "Look at it as an opportunity for growth."

Each step forward contributes to a deeper understanding of both the healthcare field and oneself. Summer will always offer time. What makes it meaningful is the intention behind how that time is used.

"Don't look at your summer as a resume builder, look at it as an opportunity for growth."
—Himakshi Patel





YEARS

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