What we are doing now: Three NARI participants are starting their summer Kaplan MCAT Prep, Trey Benally (Diné), Micah Devore (Diné), and Natalia Etsitty (Diné). Since 2018, the University of Utah—School of Medicine’s Office of Health Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion has supported the medical education preparation of 12 NARI participants through their summer MCAT Prep program. Along with their MCAT prep, the NARI participants have read several literature books on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Those books include, The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, The Scalpel and the Silver Bear, The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, and Being Mortal.

In response to feedback from previous NARI students, we created the annual Graduate School Mini-Symposium. Thirty-five percent of our NARI participants wanted more information about graduate school, and 15% said they would like more information about test preparation (GMAT, PCAT, MCAT, GRE, etc.). The Graduate School Mini-Symposium is an event that focuses on readiness, preparedness, and confidence for students who are interested in applying for graduate/professional programs. On July 16th, the Research Education Office is hosting the 2020 Virtual Graduate Mini-Symposium from 1:30-3:30 which includes free online professional and academic development. Click here to register for the virtual symposium.

What are we planning: For NARI participants who are seeking rural shadowing experience, we are planning to have an early winter opportunity for shadowing on the Navajo Area Indian Health Service in Chinlé, Arizona. This will be sponsored through the University of Utah, School of Medicine, Global, Rural, and Underserved Children’s Health (GRUCH) and Department of Pediatrics. Last summer, Lisa Wilson (Diné) and Justin Hollowell (Diné) both completed a one-week rural medicine clinical shadowing with Dr. David Sandweiss at the Navajo Area Indian Health Service in Chinlé, Arizona. The goal of the NARI Shadowing Internship is to provide interested students exposure to health delivery in a rural Native American community. If you are interested in this unique shadowing experience this coming winter, please contact

NARI Monthly Updates

July 2020

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NARI participants in the MCAT Prep Orientation with OHEDI Director, Dr. Cariello.

Left to right: Chinlé Health worker, Justin Hollowell, Lisa Wilson, Chinlé Health worker, and Dr. Sandweiss.
me at Scott.Willie@hsc.utah.edu.

Spotlight Story: The quest for understanding and mitigating the impacts of health disparities for the next generation of scientists and practitioners starts with new knowledge. “Being in a classroom full of Indigenous scholars and teachers, I felt heard and seen and overall empowered,” says Elisha Sneddy (Diné). Elisha participated with NARI in 2018 and studied under Dr. Deanna Kepka with the Huntsman Cancer Institute and Population Health Sciences. Elisha currently works with the Albuquerque Area Indian Health Board as a Program Coordinator to address topics of mental health, suicide prevention, and substance use. In 2019, Elisha attended the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for American Indian Health, 2019 Winter Institute course titled, “An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding the Health of American Indian.” Sneddy writes, “The course explored approaches that blend traditional healing with Western Medicine and other methods while applying Indigenous perspectives. We focused on health issues through different public health disciplines such as epidemiology, biostatistics, social/behavioral, environmental health, and health policy/management.” The institute’s outstanding approach to American Indian and Alaska Native health stems from 40 years of collaborative experience with over 140 tribal communities.

Elisha is the most recent recipient awarded to attend the 2020 Summer Institute course titled, “COVID-19 & Infectious Disease Outbreaks in Native American Communities”. Elisha will return to Johns Hopkins University to focus on critical learning objectives and help design health interventions of COVID-19 for New Mexico’s indigenous peoples. Elisha writes, “All that I learned so far has really shaped my career and academic goals and provided with me a framework to begin addressing the issues I am passionate about.” She encourages her NARI peers to apply for the next cycle of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Winter Institute scholarship. She writes, “We need more Indigenous healers and I am proud to share these opportunities with my NARI family because we are all in this together.”

If you are interested in learning more about Elisha’s educational experience with JHU, you may contact her by email at elishasneddy@gmail.com.

Message from Native American Research Internship (NARI) Summer Program in Diabetes, Obesity and Metabolism Co-Principal Investigator, Dr. Simon Fisher: Native American populations have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 in part due to a lack of access to testing and shortages of personal protective equipment. Additionally, chronic diseases (including diabetes), the economic impact on jobs, and persistent underfunding of American Indian health systems increases the risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19 among Native Americans. Unique to people with diabetes are at higher risk of, not contracting COVID-19, but for having a higher rates of serious complications and death than people without diabetes. Interestingly, reports indicated that the risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 is lower, if diabetes is well-managed. Thus, physicians are actively helping people with diabetes achieve better blood sugar control while diabetes research scientists are investigating the mechanism by which elevated blood sugars weaken the immune system and thereby increase the risk of experiencing serious complications from COVID-19. Clearly, we need more American Indian and Alaska Native clinicians and scientists to focus on diabetes research to help decrease health disparities among these affected communities.

Since safety of our research trainees remain our highest priority, COVID-19 has converted the summer 2020 NARI program to a virtual training platform. With safety in mind, many mentors shifted their research efforts for their current employees to work that could be completed from home (eg, data compilation, statistical analyses, manuscript preparation, writing review articles, etc...). Lab meetings and graduate courses are being conducted virtually. Seminars and lecture
series are being held live via on-line video streaming. Plans are currently being made for a resumption of normal research activities based on, 1) trainee safety, 2) direction from U of Utah leadership, 3) incidence of COVID-19 cases, and 4) state government policies.

Since 2016, Dr. Fisher has led research studies on insulin action, tissue specific cross-talk, complications of diabetes, and hormonal counter regulation. His previous NARI trainees included, Wayne New (Diné), Andrew Jordan (Chippewa), Brent Riley (Laguna Pueblo), and Ivanna Holiday (Diné), all who have progressed to excellent positions including medical school. Andrew Jordan writes, “I thrived in Dr. Fisher’s mentoring style in that with a little guidance I was able to investigate, participate, and report back in my own way. This gave me a sense of responsibility and a continued excitement in what I was researching.” Dr. Fisher is passionate on training the next generation of indigenous healers in the field of Endocrinology.

Community Events:

Community Reads—Every Tuesday starting at 2:00PM per Zoom

Graduate Mini Symposium—July 16, 2020 at 1:30PM per Zoom

Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake—COVID-19 Testing on July 18, 2020 from 8:00AM—12:00PM

National Native Health Research Training Initiative Webinar Series—June 15, 2020—More information can be found at www.NNHRTI.org

5th Annual American Indian Accessing Health Professions—August 14-15, 2020 Free Virtual conference

SACNAS Webinar series—Belong in STEM? Identifying and Succeeding Beyond Impostor Syndrome—July 17, 2020 at 12PM PST

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