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REMINDER

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Click on “Update Contact Information” and then “Current BSCP Students/Fellows and Alumni.”

BUILDING A LEGACY WITH UCHÉ BLACKSTOCK, MD

Just over five years ago, Dr. Uché Blackstock, MD, found that her ascendant career as a professor of emergency medicine and faculty director of recruitment, retention, and inclusion in the Office of Diversity Affairs at New York University (NYU) Grossman School of Medicine would become untenable. In her work with the Office of Diversity Affairs, it had become increasingly clear that the school's administration had no intention of supporting her initiatives or role in fostering inclusion and equity within the environment of academic medicine.

Today, Blackstock is the founder and CEO of Advancing Health Equity (AHE), her own consulting company founded in 2019, whose mission is to partner with health care organizations to dismantle racism in health care and to close the gap in racial health inequities. Not to mention, Blackstock became a celebrated author when her instant bestseller, *Legacy: A Black Physician Reckons with Racism in Medicine*, released to widespread acclaim at the beginning of this year.

Recently, Blackstock returned to Harvard Medical School (HMS) — where she and her twin sister had followed their mother to graduate as the first Black mother-daughter legacies in school history — to speak in conversation with president and chair of the Biomedical Science Careers Program (BSCP), Joan Reede, MD, MPH, MS, MBA. The occasion was the first BSCP Alumni Conference, where the two were featured alongside each other for a fireside chat.

Looking around the room, Blackstock recalls seeing the impact of BSCP all around her. “I was sitting in the room



Uché Blackstock, MD

looking around at all the alumni, and then that wasn't even all the alumni from the program,” she says. The professionals that Blackstock met at the BSCP Alumni Conference represented an exponential growth in mentors who will bring more students underrepresented in science and medicine to visualize their dreams and create paths to seeing them come true. A BSCP alum herself, Blackstock attended the 2004 BSCP Student Conference and is well aware of the impact that Reede's work has had on students who are underrepresented in science and medicine. “It's an exponential number of people that are impacted by Dr. Reede's initial vision for this program, absolutely,” says Blackstock. The two first met while Blackstock was a medical student at HMS.

However, Reede was far from the first mentor Blackstock met whose presence brought her confidence that she too could accomplish her dreams. Blackstock's mother, Dale Blackstock, MD, was a physician in Brooklyn, New York — Blackstock was raised in Crown Heights.

While she and her sister were in their sophomore year of undergraduate studies at Harvard, their mother passed away prematurely to leukemia at only 47 years old.

Their mother left behind patients who saw her as a pillar of their community and was a pioneer in providing what is now known as holistic care. She left them with her own desire and their firm belief that they would continue on to study medicine. “I grew up in an environment where most of the physicians I was surrounded by were black physicians. A lot of them were black women, like my pediatrician, like the doctors that lived on my block, the people that my mom worked with at SUNY Downstate Kings County Hospital Center, the public and state hospitals here in Brooklyn,” says Blackstock. “So, I didn’t recognize until I was much older how privileged I was to have that exposure at such a young age and think that was the standard or that was the norm.”

On Match Day, her faculty advisor approached her with some concern. Blackstock was interested in training in emergency medicine; she would go on to research ultrasound techniques for applications in the emergency room. But she had matched at an institution her advisor considered unusual. “Even early on as a medical student I was thinking about my impact and recognizing that I probably could have more of an impact going back

to Kings County and SUNY Downstate than staying at one of the Harvard teaching hospitals or going to one of the other very highly selective programs at an Ivy League-associated institution across the country,” says Blackstock. She spent residency at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, becoming Chief Resident in the ER in her final year.

In *Legacy*, Blackstock describes the beginning of her realizations of how her patients’ trips to the ER were symptoms of a larger system, not isolated incidences. “[It] was a manifestation of the dysfunction of our society. Ideally, you really don’t want to see people in an ER . . . I would see people who had not been receiving preventive care or who had not been receiving chronic management of their diseases.” Today, much of the work that Blackstock does with Advancing Health Equity aims to address the issues that would keep patients out of the ER to begin with. “What determines how healthy someone is, 80% of it is based on systemic factors, not on what decisions they make about what to eat or drink or exercise or not,” says Blackstock.

After residency, Blackstock joined NYU Grossman School of Medicine as an assistant professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine. As she observed rampant health inequity in clinical settings and experienced blatant racism from patients, trends of exclusion in the medical school were on the rise. She describes the process of mentoring a student named Natasha, whose path to medicine resembled Blackstock’s mother’s as the first in her family to attend college. In Natasha’s class, she was one of six Black students to matriculate. The inequity in admissions had fostered a deep sense of imposter syndrome, for which Blackstock made sure that Natasha did not feel alone in — Blackstock had felt the same way many times, and still did as the only Black faculty member in her department.

Blackstock took on the role of faculty director of recruitment, retention, and inclusion in the Office of Diversity Affairs a few years later. Ultimately, though, the administrative leaders she worked closely with at NYU proved to be unopen to meaningful change.

“We see what’s happening nationwide in terms of attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and programs. Even in places where there’s so-called support for those programs, I think there’s not a realization of the time, resources and effort that has to go into them. It’s not just like a little side job, it’s something that needs to be integrated into every single role,” says Blackstock. The role that Blackstock had been placing so much effort into was proving to have been a “figurehead” role from the start. Not only was Blackstock burning out, but she was being actively undermined in her work to create an environment that could address inequities in the medical school.

In 2019, Blackstock started to realize that if she wanted to work unimpeded by the imposed boundaries of academic medicine, she would have to work for herself. She founded AHE in March of 2019 with the plan that she would leave NYU at the end of the year. To stay afloat, Blackstock took a role working part-time in an urgent care setting while she got AHE off the ground.

In the five years since the founding of AHE, Blackstock has grown the company tremendously, now employing 15. “You go through growing pains where it becomes very apparent soon that you can’t do everything yourself,” she says. “Using my connections, I was able to meet and bring on wonderful consultants who are as committed to this work as I am. The great part is that in the process, I was able to create my own environment — workplace environment — where I feel like the folks who work for us feel really supported and appreciated.” On the side, she’s a regular contributor to NBC in on-air segments about health equity and became a major voice that New Yorkers turned to during the COVID-19 pandemic. But, in order to find a place to thrive, Blackstock had to take a leap of faith and bet on herself.

“I have to admit, in the beginning it was very scary. That’s the other thing I want to tell our students — sometimes you may make difficult choices that feel very scary, but just because they feel scary doesn’t mean they’re not the right choices,” she reflects. “Sometimes things are scary because you’re going outside of your

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comfort zone.” But what started as a part-time enterprise employing just herself has grown exponentially in the past five years, with clients across the country in industry and academia alike.

“I think what makes me feel really grateful is when I see the impact of my work,” she says. “I always say that the work that I do is heart work; it’s really a labor of love.” Looking forward, Blackstock sees a bright future for the young aspiring scientists and physicians in the United States, as long as we can support their dreams. On Tuesday, August 6, Bloomberg Philanthropies announced that they were gifting four historically Black medical schools with \$600 million. Effectively overnight, three of the four schools’ endowments had doubled in size. A representative with the foundation had reached out to Blackstock before the announcement to thank her for the work that she has done in addressing health equity in the United States. “I was just amazed that what I do can have an impact.”

Wherever BSCP students go, Blackstock wants them to make sure that they can identify mentors in their environment so that when challenges arise, they don’t have to face them by themselves. “I’m also an example and a role model for our students in terms of understanding there’s not one path that you have to take, that success looks many different ways, and that sometimes we think that we have to go down a certain path, because that’s all we know. . . . academic medicine is all I knew. My mother was in academic medicine . . . To me, that was the pinnacle of success,” says Blackstock. But academic medicine wasn’t an environment that was allowing her to do the work she feels inspired to do.

“What I recognized was that, for me, I was not in full alignment with that environment. I was actually in misalignment,” she notes. “It turned out I needed to create an environment by founding Advancing Health Equity, where I could do the work in the way that I wanted to. I didn’t have

to worry about doing it a certain way to not offend people or not doing it authentically. The great part is now I get to work with organizations that come to us because they want to do the work.”

Looking forward, Blackstock sees a future where students aren’t just engaged with the theory that one day they could become a physician, scientist or health care provider, but that they’re actively exposed to those environments at an early age. For Blackstock and her sister, heading to SUNY Downstate Medical Center to study in the cafeteria while their mother was on rounds, being surrounded by Black physicians, meant that their dreams of becoming physicians themselves felt wholly tangible.

“When I think about the work that we’ve done with academic institutions, a lot of it has been spurred by the students’ demands,” says Blackstock. “They are really the ones that are pushing things forward, and they are so incredibly sophisticated. . . . We actually have a lot to learn from them.” ■

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MMS_c IN THERAPEUTIC SCIENCES AT HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL — NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS

September brings new students to the campuses in the Longwood area of Boston, but Mark Namchuk, PhD, the academic director for the Master of Medical Sciences (MMS_c) in Therapeutic Sciences at Harvard Medical School (HMS) and BSCP student advisor, is thinking about the program’s inaugural cohort, who will start their studies a year from now. These 12 students — who upon graduating from HMS — will greet an unprecedented opportunity in the biomedical sciences industry to develop novel therapies.

“At the macro level . . . there’s a large shortfall in master’s-trained scientists, just in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and even more so nationwide,” says Namchuk, speaking frankly about statistics published by the state that highlight the need for the students that Namchuk is excited to mentor. “There’s a need for folks with this level of training,” he says, “and in fact, by percentages, there are more available jobs [at] the master’s level than at the PhD level.” With the creation of this program, Namchuk and his colleagues believe that will directly address this shortfall and set their students up for immediate success.

“Part of what we’re really trying to do with this master’s [program] is train our students not to be the folks that just simply hand a spreadsheet to somebody else, but give them the professional skills and the scientific training so they’re walking in ready to

flourish.” While Namchuk expects that many students may be interested in pursuing an MD or PhD degree after having completed the MMS_c in Therapeutic Sciences, the program has been optimized to train students interested in joining the biotech workforce immediately.

Not only will these students graduate into an industry poised to welcome them with open arms, but they’ll discover a research landscape that has expanded at an exponential pace in the past decade. “There was really a worry about the number of approved therapies in the United States versus the research and development investment in the industry, it had kind of plateaued,” remarks Namchuk. “Last year, there were 72 [approved therapies] comparatively to 10 years ago, where there were about 40. . . . It’s a remarkable turnaround.”



Mark Namchuk, PhD

After a 24-year career in the biotech industry, Dr. Namchuk has a clear vision of the many dynamics that can shape an effective drug discovery team. Speaking of his career experiences, Namchuk describes a trend where he “was always seeing that at the heart of really successful drug discovery projects, there were people who had extraordinary skill in laboratory science. This person had golden hands; and those skills were really rare,” beams Namchuk. “Often, PhD [students] who would graduate might want to spend two, three years at the bench, but then they want to move on to a supervisory position or go into something that’s more management-oriented, and so that magic they had in their fingertips gets lost.” Furthermore, rather than wait for these students to find roles in the industry, develop their skills, and then address team dynamics and personal strengths, Namchuk and the program administration will address these topics from the start. Students will be trained with a specific eye for developing not just passion for science and skills in the lab, but the essential and oft-forgotten abilities to integrate themselves into any team.

Using the power of the Harvard Medical School network of academic labs and faculty members, students in the MMSc in

Therapeutic Sciences will be given broad access to mentors and projects and will be encouraged to pursue career connections. Alongside 11 of their classmates, they’ll complete a 2-year master’s program, which will culminate in a 14-month thesis. “One of the things with the master’s [program] we were trying to avoid is sometimes you can get trained an inch deep and a mile wide in a topic,” says Namchuk. In contrast, students can expect to dive deep into a specific topic with the guidance of their mentoring principal investigator.

As the academic director for the MMSc in Therapeutic Sciences for HMS, Namchuk’s present focus is preparing to read applications for students looking forward to joining him in a deeply rewarding career developing novel therapeutics. “I hope for everybody that gets into the field, you get a chance to meet someone’s family or a person that’s been affected by the work that you did,” says Namchuk. “It’s heart stuff. It goes right to your soul. It is an amazingly rewarding experience.”

Students interested in the MMSc in Therapeutic Sciences at Harvard Medical School should inquire via email at therapeutics_masters@hms.harvard.edu. ■

BSCP TRANSITIONS SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

BSCP and Cytiva are thrilled to introduce you to the inaugural recipients of the BSCP Transitions Scholarship! Each recipient will receive \$25,000 over the course of two years for educational expenses, financial advising sessions, an assigned advisor, and support from BSCP. This year’s pilot scholarship focuses on community college to college transitions. Congratulations to our inaugural recipients of the BSCP Transitions Scholarship, Maya Blanco and Adrian Trotta!

Maya Blanco is a first-generation college student, pursuing a degree in Human Physiology and Afro-American and Black Diaspora Studies at Boston University in the Fall of 2024. Born in the Bronx, New York, Maya relocated to Boston as a toddler and takes pride in her Afro-Latina and Caribbean roots, proudly representing Honduras and the melting pot that is Dorchester, Massachusetts. Growing up in the city, Maya embraced her community’s artistic, urban nature, finding a passion for creatively expressing everything she learned and felt through poetry writing.

In efforts to nurture her interests in the human mind and body, Maya began her studies at Bunker Hill Community College, pursuing an Associate Degree in Biology while serving her local community as a Fitness Specialist. Maya is passionate about poetry, fitness, wellness, fostering community, and building a better, equitable future, especially for marginalized and underprivileged communities. Maya hopes to continue to serve diligently as a future physician, mentee, and mentor of young Black and Brown people who want to pursue higher education and careers in art and science. Maya has been a member of BSCP since 2022 and has participated in both the Biomedical Science Careers Student Conference and the Skills Workshops for College and High School Students.

Adrian Trotta recently graduated from Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) with an Associate of Science Degree in Biology. During his time there, he participated in internships at the Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Research Center and with Sanofi’s

BSCP +  cytiva

antibody development team. Adrian was president of the BHCC Biology Club and worked to expand opportunities for its members by setting up internship opportunities, hosting guest speakers from Boston’s medical and research sectors, and organizing private lab tours at facilities across Cambridge. This summer Adrian participated in the MGH Youth Neurology Program. He is currently pursuing a degree in biochemistry at Boston University and is excited to continue his passion with the support of this scholarship. His long-term goal is to pursue a PhD. Outside of academics, Adrian enjoys going to the gym, playing soccer, and learning the guitar. He has been a member of BSCP since 2022 and has participated in the Biomedical Science Careers Student Conference, BSCP Virtual Connect, and BSCP Career Development Series. ■

SAVE THE DATES — BSCP INITIATIVES AY 2024–2025

Evening of Hope

Date: Tuesday, October 22, 2024

Location: Seaport Hotel in Boston

See related article below for more information.

Skills Workshops

Date: Saturday, October 26, 2024

Location: The Toteson Medical Education Center at Harvard Medical School

Purpose: The program focuses on skills development for college, community college, and postbaccalaureate students, and high school seniors, juniors, and sophomores. There will also be a session for parents/caregivers and an internship fair.

Application deadline: October 7, 2024

New England Science Symposium (NESS) Abstract Feedback Session (Virtual)

Date: Saturday, December 7, 2024 (11:00 AM to 12:30 PM ET)

Audience: College and community college students through postdocs

Purpose: This is a virtual prep session designed for individuals who wish to receive feedback on their abstract from advisors and peers before submitting it. The meeting will be set up in small groups (5–7 individuals) where students will give a two- to four-minute elevator pitch to the group. Participating in this session is not required, nor does it guarantee acceptance to the spring symposium.

Registration deadline: November 25, 2024

Biomedical Science Careers Student Conference

Date: Friday, March 28, and Saturday, March 29, 2025

Location: The Westin Copley Place Boston

Audience: Postdocs, graduate and medical students, post-baccalaureates, college, and community college students, and high school seniors and juniors

Purpose: The Conference offers breakout and plenary sessions; keynote speakers; small group meetings between advisors and

students/fellows; networking opportunities with professionals from the biopharmaceutical industry, academia, and the National Institutes of Health; and a program featuring science resources, including fellowships, job and research opportunities, internships, and summer programs.

Application deadline: December 16, 2024, for high school students; February 3, 2025, for community college through postdoc

New England Science Symposium (NESS)

Date: Sunday, March 30, 2025

Location: Joseph B. Martin Conference Center at Harvard Medical School

Audience: College and community college students through postdocs

Purpose: NESS provides a forum for students and fellows to share their biomedical and health-related research activities through oral or poster presentations, engage in discussions related to career development in the sciences, exchange ideas, and expand their professional networks.

Abstract submission deadline: January 6, 2025

To submit an abstract or to register, go to www.NewEnglandScienceSymposium.org.

Career Fair (Virtual)

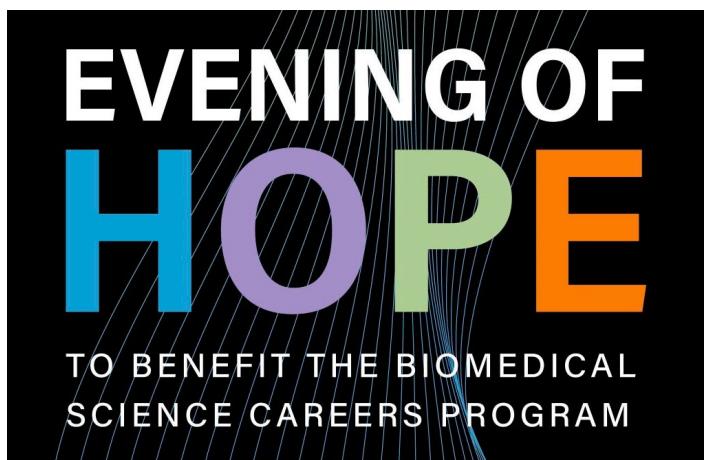
Date: May 2025 — exact date to come

Audience: Students (college, postbac, and graduate) who have recently or are about to graduate, and postdocs looking for full-time opportunities

Purpose: To provide a virtual venue where BSCP students and fellows will be able to connect with organizations in industry, academia, and government to establish professional relationships and discuss potential job and/or fellowship opportunities.

Registration information will be available in spring 2025.

For more information on all programs and information on registration where necessary, please visit www.bscp.org or contact Hollie Borek DeSilva at hollie_desilva@hms.harvard.edu. ■



This year's Evening of Hope celebration is being held on Tuesday, October 22, at the Seaport Hotel in Boston, where we will bring together nearly 400 attendees for an inspiring evening — all in support of diversifying the biomedical sciences and health professions and closing the equity gap for people of color and other marginalized groups. This event raises the majority of the funds needed to support BSCP programs, which are always offered at no cost to participants, and celebrates the organization's successes. We are thrilled this year to honor Matthew Slater of the New England Patriots and Shahrzad Slater, MD, MPH, of the Slater Family Foundation for their amazing work within the community and also recognize our latest cohort of scholarship and honor roll recipients. Event information can be found at www.bscp.org. ■