SOURCE Champion of the Month
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Jennifer Plotkin
Johns Hopkins School of Medicine
1st Year Medical Student

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What do you do as your community engagement activity?
HIV Counseling and Testing at the Harriet Lane Clinic (HLC) and Coordinator for the Community Adolescent Sex Education Program (CASE)

How much time do you spend on service per week/month?
28 hours per month

How did you begin to work with your community-based organization (CBO)?
I began working with the HLC and CASE my first semester of medical school. With CASE, I taught in an 8th grade boys classroom. This semester, I am co-coordinating the program with one medical and two public health students.
What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?
I believe that an integral aspect of serving a community is being a part of it. As a physician, I hope to connect deeply to my patients and leverage that connection to help them improve their health. By being involved in service in the community, I am getting to know the character and needs of the place I will practice medicine in. Baltimore is such an amazing community to be a part of!

How do you find time for service in your busy schedule?
Life is always busy, and it’s never going to become less busy. Because of this, I believe that I have to prioritize the things that are important to me consistently. Thus, I make time for service every week.

Besides finding the time, what barriers related to your service have you had to overcome?
One challenge I faced was creating a safe environment for my class of 8th grade boys to talk about sexual health. At first, our students were understandably shy and giddy; this was a topic that they may have never discussed with their peers. My co-teachers and I worked with the students to set ground rules about how our classroom would run. We set a tone of taking students’ questions seriously and using correct terminology. After a few sessions, we built enough trust such that we could have thorough conversations about sexual health.

How has your training in Hopkins influenced the way you approach service?
In the school of medicine, I am surrounded by classmates who believe that being an advocate for social change is an important responsibility of being a physician. I, too, believe this. Doing service is an important first step in getting to know community needs and discovering how I can best advocate for my patients.

How does your service shape your development as a health care professional?
Through HIV Counseling and Testing and CASE, I have learned how to build trust with teenagers to have honest conversations about sexual health. Medicine involves having difficult conversations with patients around sensitive topics. Through these activities, I have grown skills that are applicable to many aspects of medical counseling.

What advice do you have for prospective students who are interested in community service?
I would tell prospective students to seek out community service opportunities that they are exceptionally passionate about. I believe that people are best utilized when they are doing service they find meaningful. So whatever the cause that lights a fire in you, find a corresponding community-identified need, and pursue that.

What would you say to someone who is unsure of the impact his/her service would have on a community?
I would say that he or she should remain picky about choosing service that truly does affect the community. The best projects are those that center around a community-defined need. Thus, one can be sure that what they are doing is something that is needed in the community.
What is the community service accomplishment that has affected you and/or your community the most?
I have had a few patient encounters at HLC where I helped a teenage girl find the best contraceptive option for her. There are many birth control options, and sometimes busy clinicians do not have the time to help a patient navigate them. I find it really rewarding to talk through a patient’s concerns and preferences and help match them to their best method.

Final Comments
I have found both CASE and HIV Counseling and Testing to be extremely rewarding and fun ways to engage with our adolescent population. Feel free to contact me for more information!

SOURCE@jhu.edu
SOURCE.jhu.edu