

## **Prioritizing the Emerging Scholars of Family Medicine**

LCDR Brian Ford, USU

Brian.ford@usuhs.edu

The national leadership of Family Medicine has recently attempted to reframe and prioritize research in the field. The research committee is excited to introduce a pilot program for the upcoming USAFP Conference. Family Medicine has always been a countercultural specialty, with a focus on clinical work rather than basic science research. However, research has evolved over the years to include issues, concerns, populations, and considerations relevant to the specialty's clinical emphasis. Despite this, many individual departments of internal medicine have more research funding and publications than the entire Family Medicine specialty (1). The same disparity exists in the Military Health System, with departmental research portfolios exceeding those of Family Medicine despite the latter's overrepresentation in clinical care delivery.

There is a clear need to emphasize research relevant to Family Medicine to advance clinical care and population health. One way to achieve this is by encouraging a new generation of Family Physicians interested in research and exposed to research environments throughout their medical education. This should start from their preclinical years and continue through their clerkship experiences and Graduate Medical Education. Research focuses would ultimately help patients by prioritizing and executing relevant research, while also attracting those with research interests to Family Medicine.

A 2022 study on the Informal Curriculum surrounding Family Medicine at 16 US Medical Schools showed that positive perceptions of Family Medicine research were the most significant association with matching into a career in Family Medicine (2). The Research Committee hopes to use this evidence to encourage student participation in Family Medicine research throughout their undergraduate medical education. For the 2024 USAFP Annual Conference, there will be a special Emerging Scholars Section for students to showcase their scholarly activities that just missed the cutoff for one of the invitational research programs at USAFP. Students will showcase their research in a low-stakes setting while networking with colleagues, faculty, and residents. This early exposure to research will positively serve them as they prepare for future work and application to residency, reinforcing the importance of clinical and population health-minded research in the identity of a future Family Physician.

As to why undergraduate learners do not participate in research, they frequently cite lack of knowledge, lack of time, and lack of mentorship. A research mentor can help the undifferentiated learner on a path to Family Medicine by demonstrating curiosity and fostering an environment of inquiry, both at the bedside and in the stewardship of population and warfighter health. Many students perceive that academic research needs to be longitudinal or that they must have an original research idea. They may fail to contextualize participation in a small project or writing up a case as the “research” that is so commonly presented to them via lectures. A research mentor can plant the seed for engagement with the literature about something as small as a single clinical encounter or as large as a trial. This mentorship, and what

we are hopeful to start to grow with the Emerging Scholars track is making it clear that research is a dynamic thing that has meaningful extensions to the clinical art and science of Family Medicine.

The Emerging Scholars sessions will provide positive opportunities for networking and collaboration, build excitement, and serve as a longitudinal experience with Family Medicine research. We need more Family Physicians and more Family Physicians interested in research. We also need to frame the scope, effort, and applicability of research within the context of our profoundly clinically relevant specialty for the next generation of Family Physician Scholars.

### References

1. Newton W, Asif IM, Weidner A. A Milestone for Promoting Research in Family Medicine. *Ann Fam Med*. 2023 Nov-Dec;21(6):564-566. doi: 10.1370/afm.3067
2. Beinhoff P, Prunuske J, Phillips JP, et al. Associations of the Informal Curriculum and Student Perceptions of Research With Family Medicine Career Choice. *Fam Med*. 2023;55(4):233-237.
3. Kumar J, Memon A, Kumar A, Kumari R, Kumar B, Fareed S. Barriers Experienced by Medical Students in Conducting Research at Undergraduate Level. *Cureus*. 2019 Apr 13;11(4):e4452.