

AUA ALUMNI



*MEDICINE ISN'T
JUST A CAREER,
IT'S A PROMISE
TO SERVE.*

Dr.Gunawardhana '16





The background of the entire page is a blue-tinted photograph of a school campus. On the left, there is a multi-story school building with a flagpole in front of it. A paved path curves from the bottom left towards the center of the image. The overall scene is peaceful and institutional.

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Letter from the **President**



We hope this message finds you well and thriving in your personal and professional journey. At the American University of Antigua College of Medicine, we are continually inspired by the remarkable accomplishments of our alumni. Your successes around the world—whether in clinical practice, research, academic leadership, or community health—are a true testament to your hard work, resilience, and dedication to the field of medicine. We are immensely proud of all that you have achieved.

Each year, we eagerly follow your career progress, and it brings us great joy to hear about your milestones and contributions to healthcare. Please continue to share your stories—they not only uplift our community but also inspire current and future AUA students to pursue excellence.

We are also proud to share that the 2025 Match season once again showcased the strength of our alumni. The graduating class secured prestigious residency placements and graduates were selected to participate in competitive fellowships across a range of specialties. This continued success highlights the caliber of our alumni network and the impact you're making in medicine worldwide.

As you continue on your professional path, we encourage you to stay connected with the AUA Alumni Association under the leadership of Dr. Riggs and Ms. Par Prem Kumar. They are working diligently to strengthen alumni engagement, foster networking opportunities, and celebrate the achievements of our global AUA family. Your involvement helps build a stronger, more connected community.

Thank you for representing AUA with integrity and excellence. Your accomplishments are the heart of our university's legacy.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Peter Bell

Dear AUA ALUMNI,

Welcome to the 2025 edition of the AUA Alumni Magazine! The American University of Antigua Alumni Organization (AUA AO) is entering an exciting new chapter under the leadership of our new Vice President, Dr. John Riggs, and myself.

I am thrilled to share our vision with you and to express how incredibly proud we are of everything you continue to accomplish.

With nearly 4,000 graduates, our alumni community is a powerful network. From the hospital floors to research labs, clinics, classrooms, and beyond, your work is truly inspiring—and it deserves to be celebrated.

We are committed to keeping this network strong by updating our alumni database, publishing quarterly newsletters, and spotlighting your achievements in our annual magazine and on social media.

Additionally, we are expanding opportunities for alumni to support current students. These include the chance to teach student special interest groups, speak to newly accepted student cohorts, and participate in our new Medical Alumni Match Program, which will pair recent graduates with alumni who share the same specialty and/or location.

As part of this expansion of benefits, alumni will soon have access to library resources, including publications and periodicals, free of charge.

To help keep everyone informed, we're introducing new Class Communications Chairs who will share news about events, reunions, and networking opportunities in key cities. We're also excited to announce the creation of a new alumni awards program, led by our dedicated awards committee, to recognize the outstanding contributions of our community.

Our goal, as always, is to foster a lifelong, mutual relationship between you and AUA—one rooted in pride, connection, and purpose.

If you'd like to get involved or lend your time to any initiative, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact us at alumni@auamed.org. Please do follow our updates on the Alumni website and social media. We would be glad to hear from you, your milestones, achievements and anything you would like to share.

With gratitude and admiration,

Par Prem Kumar





Dr. Swathi Krishna, MD

AUA Class of 2010
Medical Director
Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Frontier Psychiatry, Montana

I didn't take the traditional route to medicine. I started off in a large, competitive pre-med program at a major university in the U.S., but I was young, just seventeen, and overwhelmed. The classes were massive, and I wasn't ready. After a few rough semesters, my advisors told me I wasn't cut out for medicine. At that point, I believed them.

So, I pivoted. I went to business school and worked in finance and marketing for a few years. I even worked in physician staffing, and that's when something shifted. I saw the kind of work doctors were doing, and I realized I still wanted that. This time, I knew myself better. I was older, more focused, and more determined.

I finished my remaining pre-med requirements, did well on the MCAT, and decided I couldn't afford to wait for a traditional U.S. medical school path. I knew several people in my community who had gone through the Caribbean, and AUA stood out because of its structure and support. I met with Dick Woodward, who took a chance on me through the AICASA (now AUACAS) program, and I'll never forget it. I always tell him, "You're the reason I'm a doctor."

That first semester helped me get my footing. AUA felt personal. The classes were smaller. The professors were hands-on. We lived close to faculty, and if you needed help, you could actually get it. That kind of access and encouragement made all the difference. I ended up earning a few awards and fully enrolling in the MD program.

I enjoyed medical school and felt well prepared for clinical rotations. I never saw myself as less than anyone else, but I did feel like I had to prove myself. I worked a little harder, came in a little earlier, and stayed a little later. It wasn't about making excuses. It was about showing up, doing the work, and handling each challenge with purpose.

Initially, I thought I would go into family medicine. But my very first clinical rotation was in psychiatry, and it just clicked. It wasn't about protocols or quick answers. It was about people. I saw how psychiatrists spent time getting to know patients, understanding their lives, and building care plans tailored to the person, not just the diagnosis. It felt like art as much as science. When I rotated in child psychiatry, I knew I had found my path.

I completed my general psychiatry residency at Morehouse School of Medicine, followed by a child and adolescent psychiatry fellowship at

Emory. I am now dual board-certified in both. My clinical work focuses on children, adolescents, and young adults, and I use a combination of medication management, cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness, and holistic approaches. I believe in collaborating with patients and families to set realistic goals that care for both the mind and body.

Getting into those programs was not easy. As a Caribbean grad, I had to network, volunteer, and put myself out there. I visited campuses, introduced myself, and built connections. I did not wait for doors to open. I knocked on them. I also had the opportunity to serve as a Minority Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association and participated in mental health innovation projects through both the APA and Stanford University. Those experiences helped shape how I approach care today, with a focus on equity and innovation. Today, I serve as the Medical Director of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Frontier Psychiatry, a physician-led telehealth practice based in Montana. We provide care across Montana, Idaho, and Alaska, reaching patients who might live hours from the nearest psychiatrist.

Telehealth allows us to deliver collaborative, high-quality care to rural and underserved communities. We work closely with families, schools, and primary care providers to create a coordinated treatment experience that supports the whole child.

I am especially passionate about educating others on what child psychiatry truly is. It is not just about prescribing medications. It is about building trust, understanding a child's environment, and giving families the tools and confidence, they need to support mental wellness.

Work-life balance is something I protect intentionally. I chose psychiatry because I wanted to love my work and still have space for myself. I enjoy traveling, spending time outdoors, and being with the people I love. I am a proud wife and mother, and those roles bring me joy and grounding in ways that make me a better physician.

To future AUA students: your journey may not be perfect, and that is okay. What matters is that you stay committed, show up every day, and never lose sight of who you are becoming. The best physicians are not defined by where they start, but by how they show up when it counts.

Dr. Tanya V. Menard, MD, FAPA

AUA Class of 2011

Adult and Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

Associate Chief of Psychiatry, Behavioral Health

Kaiser Permanente

Georgia

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*“Mental health care isn’t just
my profession;
it’s my passion,
my mission,
and my way of
giving back.”*

”



I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, surrounded by healthcare from the start. My mother was a registered nurse working night shifts in the ER, and my father a dental technician. At the time, I didn't fully appreciate what that meant. I just knew that Mom was always there to drop me off and pick me up from school. That kind of presence and flexibility planted a seed in me, long before I realized I would follow in their footsteps.

I was always drawn to the “why” behind human behavior. TV shows like Criminal Minds or CSI didn't catch my attention because of the crime-solving, but because I wanted to understand what was going on in the minds of the people involved. I was fascinated by the psychology of it all. Eventually, I found my path in psychiatry, not just for therapy, but for the ability to treat holistically, including through medication.

After studying psychobiology at SUNY Binghamton, I spent two years teaching high school biology and chemistry. Coaching track and field after school gave me a chance to see teenagers outside the classroom, when their guard was down and their real selves came forward. It was then I knew I wanted to keep working with this age group, just not in a classroom. I wanted to support them as a psychiatrist.

I only applied to AUA. I knew I wanted to travel, to see the world, and the idea of studying medicine on a Caribbean Island in my twenties felt right. And while some people pictured 365 beaches, I was laser-focused on the academics. I wasn't the most social person on campus, but I found my people in a small, tight-knit study group. We created wild mnemonics and laughed our way through tough exams. To this day, we're still friends, almost 20 years later.

One of the most impactful parts of my time at AUA was being a teaching assistant for late Dr. Steve Glasser's neurology class. I didn't just excel in the course; I loved the content. It was a sign that I had chosen the right path. That passion followed me into my clinical rotations, which took me from Puerto Rico to Louisiana, and eventually back home to Brooklyn. I matched into psychiatry at SUNY Downstate and later completed a child and adolescent psychiatry fellowship at Northwell (then North Shore-LIJ).

After working in psychiatric emergency rooms in New York, I knew I needed a better quality of life, especially after having my first child. We made the move to Atlanta, and I've now been with Kaiser Permanente for nearly a decade. I started as a staff psychiatrist and gradually moved into leadership roles. Today, I serve as Associate Chief of Psychiatry, overseeing everything from medication management to recruitment and retention across the department. I'm also deeply involved in national speaking engagements and passionate about perinatal mental health.

That work became personal when I saw first-hand the gaps in care for pregnant and postpartum people, especially Black women, who are statistically at higher risk and less likely to receive care. After a tragic patient case, we developed new protocols to better support and monitor our most vulnerable patients. It's been some of the most meaningful work of my career.

Outside of medicine, I'm just mom to Ryan and Riley, wife to my husband (a creative videographer), and someone who firmly believes in writing herself “prescriptions” for selfcare. I've learned that I'm at my best as a psychiatrist when I've taken the time to rest, reset, and refill my own cup.

To anyone considering psychiatry: it's not for the faint of heart, but if it's for you, you'll know. The world needs more of us, and there's still so much more to give.

Dr. Ryan Fillmore, MD

AUA Class of 2014

Neurointensivist,
Critical Care Neurophysiologist,
and Chair of Neurology
Novant Health Presbyterian
Medical Center,
Charlotte, NC



I've always had a fascination with neuroscience. As an undergrad, I wasn't sure how that interest would translate into a career, but my father's work played a big role in shaping my path. He's a first assistant in surgery, primarily assisting on neurosurgical cases, and watching him work solidified my desire to pursue medicine. I didn't have bad grades or test scores, but like many, I faced the competitiveness of the traditional U.S. medical school process.

AUA offered me a chance to begin my medical journey without delay. It was clear to me that the school had a strong academic foundation, experienced faculty, and well-organized clinical rotations. The communication and support from AUA during the admissions process made the decision even easier. I took that leap, and I have never looked back.

Adjusting to life in Antigua came with the usual culture shock and homesickness, but the island quickly grew on me. I had all the resources I needed, and I knew that I was exactly where I was supposed to be. I appreciated how rigorous and structured the program was. Faculty like Dr. Amaralli and Dr. Wahida left a lasting impression on me. They pushed me hard, and their tough love helped shape the physician I would become.

“WE ARE A DIFFERENT BREED.

Medical training is hard enough, but what we endured made us tougher and more resilient.

”

During rotations in Miami, New York, Maryland, and Ohio, I felt completely prepared. AUA’s use of shelf exams and emphasis on accountability made me confident in my clinical knowledge and skills. I never felt out of place standing next to students from U.S. schools. In fact, many of us bonded over our shared experiences. New York in particular holds a special place in my heart. It was intense, but it was where I truly found my stride.

After graduating from AUA, I matched into neurology residency at Virginia Commonwealth University, then completed two fellowships, one in neurocritical care at UC Irvine, and another in epilepsy at Yale. These experiences gave me a broad and deep understanding of neurocritical illness. Neurology has many subspecialties, from neurointerventional surgery to stroke, movement disorders, neuroimmunology, and more. I always encourage students to explore them early during rotations to find what truly resonates with them.

Today, I serve as a Neurointensivist, Critical Care Neurophysiologist, and Chair of Neurology at Novant Health in Charlotte, North Carolina. I manage the neuro ICU, care for patients with brain injuries, seizures, strokes, and neuromuscular conditions, and perform critical care procedures like intubations and central line placements. I also interpret EEGs and teach medical students as Adjunct Assistant Professor at UNC Chapel Hill School of Medicine, Department of Neurology – Charlotte Campus. I recently stepped down from a role as interim stroke medical director, and I was honored to be named one of Novant Health’s nine Distinguished Physicians out of more than 2,500.

Over time, I developed my own style as an attending, especially around documentation. I started keeping my notes and attestations more concise, which saved me time and allowed more meaningful interactions with families and time for teaching.

One of the most powerful moments in my career was when a patient’s family invited me over for dinner after their loved one made a remarkable recovery. Those connections remind me why I do what I do. On the harder days, delivering heart breaking news and navigating end-of-life discussions can take an emotional toll. Being a source of strength for families, even in their darkest moments, is one of the most important things I do.

Work-life balance is essential. I work seven-day stretches with long hours, so I’ve learned how to reset. I’m an aspiring polyglot, someone who loves learning and speaking multiple languages. I’m fluent in Spanish and am currently studying Arabic, Farsi, and Italian, and I’ve dabbled in Hindi and Gujarati. I play the oud, a Middle Eastern string instrument, and I love CrossFit, hiking, and travel. Connecting with patients in their native tongue or relating to them through culture often builds trust that medicine alone can’t create.

To future AUA students: do not let anyone make you feel like you don’t belong. Choose your specialty based on passion, not salary. The money will follow. If you truly enjoy what you do, everything else will fall into place. Stay curious, be proactive, and never stop showing up. That’s what makes a great physician.

A portrait of Dr. Sachin Shenoy, MD, a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and red tie. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred green outdoor setting.

Dr. Sachin Shenoy, MD

AUA Class of 2015

Assistant Professor

Department of OB-GYN
OB-GYN Clinical Clerkship Director
University of Alabama
Vice Chair of Obstetrics and
Gynecology and Chair of Robotic Surgery
DCH Regional Medical Center, Alabama

I was born and raised in Sugar Land, Texas, and did my undergrad at the University of Houston. Early on, I worked as a research assistant, but I quickly realized that sitting behind a desk wasn't for me. I wanted to do something in medicine, but I wasn't sure exactly what. I came across AUA and spoke with a few friends who had gone through the Manipal program in India. They shared positive experiences, and I saw it as a viable path forward. That decision turned out to be one of the best of my life.

“ *If someone says you can’t do it,
prove them wrong.*

*Your work ethic will take you further
than anyone’s opinion.* ”

The Manipal campus gave me a strong academic foundation. When I transitioned to rotations, I felt prepared and ready. Every rotation I did sparked a new interest. Internal medicine? I wanted that. Pediatrics? Loved it. Surgery? Even better. But when I finally did my OB-GYN rotation in Atlanta at Dekalb, everything just clicked. It felt like a perfect blend, clinic, primary care, surgery, even pediatrics and geriatrics, all in one field.

What really solidified my decision was my preceptor, who had just finished residency. He took me under his wing, answered all my questions, and involved me in every part of the practice. I got to deliver babies, scrub into surgeries, manage patients, and truly learn. That kind of mentorship made a lasting impression. From then on, all my electives were OB-GYN focused, oncology, maternal-fetal medicine, general OB-GYN. I was hooked.

Rotations taught me that learning medicine isn’t just about memorizing facts. It’s about engaging with real people and developing your clinical instincts. I threw myself into every opportunity, studied hard, asked questions, and made sure to be part of the team. That mindset carried me far.

After medical school, I matched into residency and went on to complete a fellowship in minimally invasive gynaecologic surgery. Today, I wear several hats. I’m an Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama and serve as Vice Chair of Obstetrics and Chair of the Robotics Committee at our regional hospital. I’m also the Clerkship Director for third- and fourth-year medical students, which means I spend a lot of time teaching and mentoring. It’s a full plate, but it’s the kind of busy that gives me purpose.

There’s a lot happening in OB-GYN right now. We’re seeing major advancements in robotic and minimally invasive surgery, as well as shifts in maternal health policy and access to care. These changes are creating both challenges and opportunities for innovation.

Fridays are my OR days, where I focus on complex robotic and laparoscopic surgeries. Many patients are referred to me because their cases are too advanced for standard care. My goal is to get them home the same day and back to their lives quickly and safely. Technology is constantly evolving, and I stay current to give my patients the best.

Looking ahead, I’d like to explore surgical education and simulation training even further. I’m passionate about teaching, and I believe expanding access to hands-on training could help shape the next generation of confident, skilled surgeons.

Work-life balance is something I take seriously. I’m a self-proclaimed workaholic, but I make time to unwind. I love to cook, especially barbecue and spend time with my two dogs: a Goldendoodle named Luna and a Yorkie named Milo, who has more attitude than size. Weekends are for sports, reading, and road trips. I’ve found that balance isn’t about doing less; it’s about making time for what matters.

To future AUA students, especially those thinking about OB-GYN: don’t let anyone define your limits. I was told I might not match into OB-GYN and should consider other specialties. I took that as fuel. Work hard, seek out mentors, write that case report, ask for feedback. Growth happens outside your comfort zone. Surround yourself with people who challenge you to be better, and prove to yourself that you belong in any room you walk into.

Medicine is tough, but so are you. Keep pushing. Keep learning. And never stop showing up.

“

**There will always be noise.
Learn to tune it out and
believe in yourself.
You absolutely can do this.**

”



Dr. Parija Sharedalal, MD

AUA Class of 2015

Interventional Cardiologist Medicor

Cardiology, New Jersey

I didn't grow up around medicine. No one in my family is a doctor, and I didn't have a roadmap. I went to a large public college in New York where pre-med classes were packed with hundreds of students, and individualized guidance was non-existent. So, I applied broadly, without knowing much about the process, and AUA was the first school that accepted me. Within weeks of receiving that letter, I was on a flight to Antigua. Looking back, it was one of the boldest decisions I've ever made.

I landed in the January term, so most students had already arrived. I'll never forget being the only one on the AUA shuttle from the airport, heading to student housing in the dark, unsure of what I had just signed up for. But by the next morning, I walked into campus and immediately felt something shift. Things started to come together, and over time, I found my footing.

I went in unprepared. I didn't even know there were multiple licensing exams. But AUA stepped up for me. The faculty were incredibly supportive, the friendships I built were lasting, and the mentoring I received helped lay the foundation for everything that came next. I give AUA a lot of credit for helping me become the physician I am today.

When I started rotations, I felt ready.

Objectively, we were just as prepared as U.S. med students. But there's a stigma, and it lingers. As a Caribbean grad, self-doubt crept in. That's the part nobody tells you, the fear of matching, the uncertainty. But once you begin working, it becomes clear that our training holds up. You push a little harder, and it shows. My husband, who is also a Caribbean grad and now an academic physician, says the same. We've seen first-hand how hard Caribbean grads work, how seriously we take the opportunity.

I didn't always know I'd land in cardiology. I thought I'd do heme-onc or OB at one point. But I ultimately matched into a residency program with a strong cardiology department, and that exposure shaped my path. I went on to complete fellowship training in cardiovascular disease and interventional cardiology at respected institutions. That experience gave me not just the clinical skills, but the confidence to grow into this role.

The interventional year was the hardest of my life. My first child was six months old when I started, and I barely saw him that year. My husband held down the fort, and it reminded me that this kind of work takes a village. It was exhausting but also rewarding. One night during my first trimester of my second pregnancy, I was on call at 3 a.m. for a patient in cardiac shock. He had coded over 30 times. I stayed with him until morning, placed an Impella device, and got him stabilized. Months later, the same patient walked into my office and gave me a hug. I had just returned from maternity leave. Moments like that remind you why the grind is worth it.

Today, I practice general and interventional cardiology at Medicor Cardiology in New Jersey. I am board-certified and treat a range of conditions including coronary artery disease, valvular heart disease, and peripheral vascular disease. I perform procedures such as coronary angioplasty, stenting, and vascular interventions using advanced, minimally invasive techniques. My passion lies in innovation and patient-centered care. I am also involved in research and education, and I believe that staying engaged with emerging technologies is essential to improving outcomes.

Private practice gives me the variety and flexibility I value. I manage patients both in the office and in the cath lab, and I take STEMI call as part of our group. More importantly, it allows me to be present with my family. I am a wife, a mother of two, and someone who deeply values work-life balance. My husband and I both understand the demands of this field, and we support each other through every season.

To students considering this path: be honest with yourself. Know what kind of lifestyle you want, and don't feel pressured to pick a specialty just because it is considered prestigious. This is a marathon. If you're not happy, it will show. You can always pivot. You can stop training when you're ready. You can switch jobs. And most importantly, find a mentor. A good mentor will open doors, plug you into the right network, and help you believe in your potential even when others don't.



Dr. Pedro Torres, MD

AUA Class of 2015
Intensivist and
Emergency Medicine Physician
Captain, United States Air Force Reserve

My path to medicine was anything but typical. Growing up in New York, I didn't have a clear sense of direction in college. I started out thinking I might pursue clinical laboratory science, but I hadn't yet discovered my true calling. That changed dramatically during a traumatic moment early in my life. One of my best friends and former teammates died in a motorcycle accident right before my eyes. I remember feeling completely helpless as EMS tried to revive him. That moment stayed with me. It made me reflect deeply on life, service, and what I wanted to do.

I started volunteering with Brentwood Legion Ambulance, my local EMS agency, and became a paramedic, the highest level in prehospital care. I fell in love with it. EMS introduced me to patient care in its rawest form. Providing care and hope to people in crisis gave me a sense of purpose I hadn't known before.

My grades weren't perfect, but AUA looked at me as a whole person. I studied not just for tests but for life. Faculty like Dr. Amirali and the late Dr. Singh believed in tough love and accountability. Dr. Amirali would challenge us to learn from black-and-white images, reminding us that medicine does not come with colored labels or answers. His mantra, "Teacher, teacher, give me crayons," taught us to think for ourselves and trust our clinical instincts.

Life in Antigua was a welcome surprise. The island was beautiful and provided everything I needed, from food to transportation to a strong academic structure. It wasn't just about the location; it was about the people and support system.

“

The ICU gives me the privilege of bringing hope to patients and their families when they need it most.

”

My parents, who are originally from the Dominican Republic, were reassured knowing I was in a safe, resource-rich place focused on my growth. I still speak highly of those years and hope to return someday.

During clinicals, I worked weekends as a paramedic on Long Island. That real-time application of knowledge helped me retain and apply what I was learning, especially for Step 2. I rotated mostly in New York, with electives in California at Kaweah Delta and Brooklyn Hospital. Rotations were limited, so I had to be proactive. In one rotation, I met an attending who later connected me to a program director in Puerto Rico, where I eventually matched. I never rotated in Puerto Rico before matching. That experience taught me the value of professionalism and relationships. Your reputation can open doors you didn't even know existed.

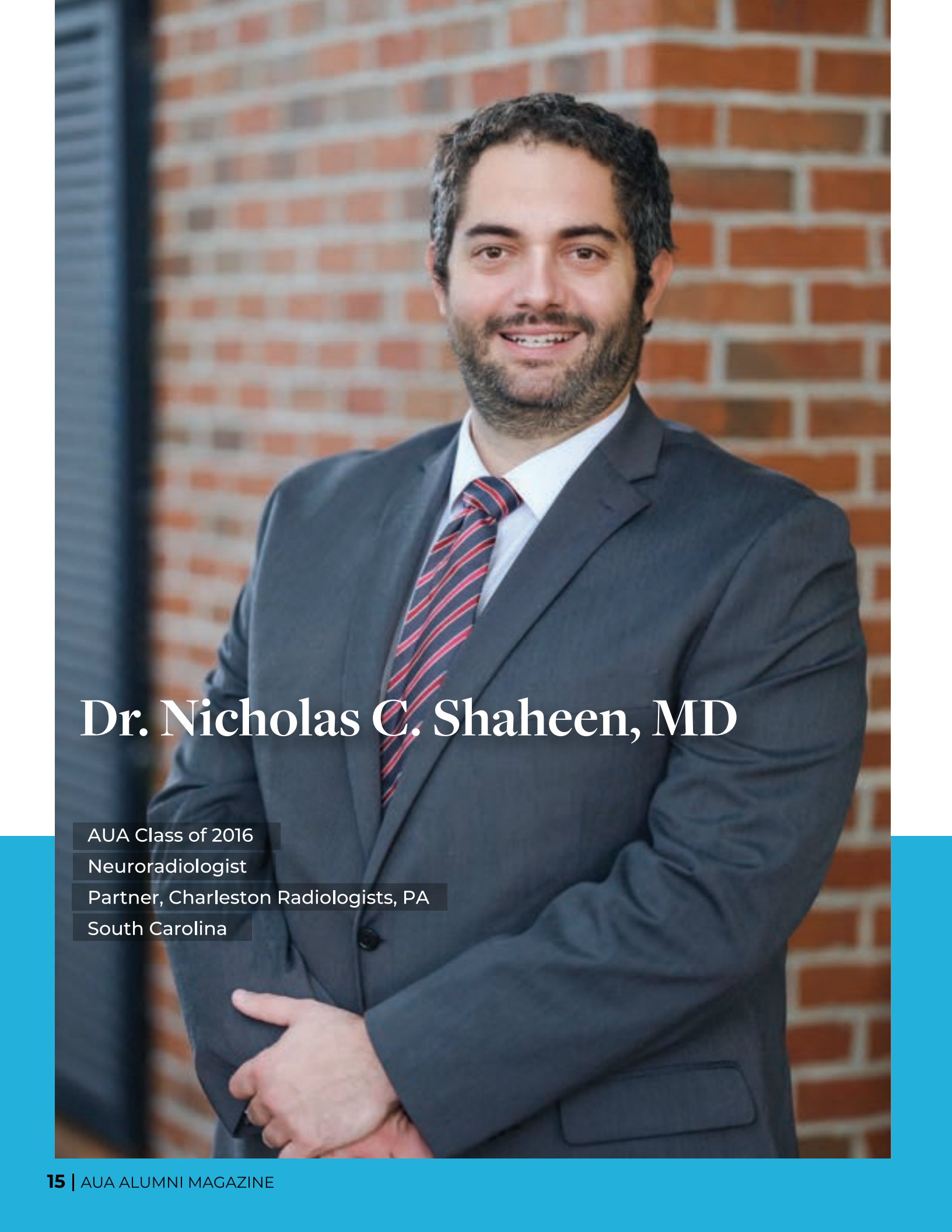
My emergency medicine residency at Saint Luke's Hospital in Ponce, Puerto Rico, gave me exposure to a wide spectrum of conditions and prepared me to practice independently. But I wanted to do more. I craved deeper involvement with critically ill patients, so I pursued a fellowship in trauma surgical critical care at Albany Medical Center. Fellowship training provided the exposure and to complex trauma, surgical and medical patients from which I built the skillset and confidence to care for the sickest of the sick.

Today, I practice in Tucson, Arizona, splitting my time between the ICU and emergency department. It's a dynamic combination that keeps me sharp and humbled. I work alongside intensivists from diverse backgrounds, and together we manage everything from neuro to cardiac to medical ICU cases. No two days are the same, and I love that. Last year, I joined the United States Air Force Reserve as a Captain and physician on a Critical Care Air Transport Team (CCATT). We train to convert aircraft into flying ICUs, transporting the critically ill or injured to destinations where they can receive definitive care. It has added a new layer of purpose to my career. It reminds me why I chose medicine in the first place. To serve.

Work-life balance matters, and I've structured my schedule with intention to be present for my wife and three young children, who are my anchor and my biggest source of joy. I work one week a month in the ICU, a few ER shifts each month, and fulfill my military duties quarterly.

In this field, emotions run high, and it's crucial to learn how to manage stress and take mindful pauses. Emergency medicine demands that you reset quickly and stay emotionally agile.

To future AUA students: the specialty will often choose you, not the other way around. Explore everything. Show up with curiosity and resilience. Never chase titles or money. Chase meaning. The rest will follow.

A portrait of Dr. Nicholas C. Shaheen, MD, a man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a red and blue striped tie. He is standing in front of a brick wall with his arms crossed. The image is framed by a blue border at the bottom and sides.

Dr. Nicholas C. Shaheen, MD

AUA Class of 2016

Neuroradiologist

Partner, Charleston Radiologists, PA

South Carolina



*“AUA gave me a chance when no one else would.
I made it my mission to prove that AUA
graduates belong at the top.”*

I always knew I wanted to pursue medicine, but it wasn't until my clinical years that I discovered my true calling – radiology. With my dad being a medical physicist and my mom a nurse, health-care was always part of my world. Today, I'm a board-certified neuroradiologist and a partner at Charleston Radiologists. I diagnose complex neurological conditions and lead a team that serves multiple hospitals and imaging centers. Looking back, I can confidently say AUA shaped my journey and opened the door to a fulfilling career.

I applied to multiple medical schools and didn't get in. Then I received a notification about AUA, took a chance, applied – and got accepted into the MD program. That acceptance changed everything for me.

So, when I landed at AUA, I knew I had to give it everything I had. From day one, I immersed myself in my studies, fully aware that I needed to work hard and make the most of the opportunity I'd been given.

Two professors at AUA deeply shaped my path: Dr. Viswanath Srikanteswara (“Dr. Sri”) sparked my interest in anatomy, and the late Dr. Steve Glasser brought neuroanatomy to life with his humor and energy. Their influence stayed with me. As a radiologist, my work revolves around anatomy, those early lessons became the foundation of everything I do today.

Early on, I explored a few different specialties, but I kept coming back to radiology. I was always fascinated by anatomy, and radiology is entirely anatomy-based.

The turning point came during my clinical rotations, when a resident let me take the lead in reviewing cases.

That hands-on experience made me realize just

how much of an impact radiologists have in diagnosing and guiding patient care.

AUA didn't just give me a start – it gave me a sense of loyalty and purpose. There was a perception about international medical graduates, and I wanted to prove that AUA-trained doctors can absolutely compete at the highest level. During my rotations, I carried that pride with me. I wanted to show up, work hard, and change minds – one attending, one patient, one day at a time. That experience taught me that excellence in medicine comes from a combination of skill, knowledge, and hard work.

Radiology is evolving fast. AI, advanced imaging, and telemedicine are transforming how we work. While some fear AI might replace radiologists, I don't see it that way. AI will enhance our work, not replace it. It'll improve efficiency and help us provide faster, more accurate diagnoses.

I'm also passionate about expanding access to radiology in underserved areas. With remote reading technology, we can make sure people in rural or remote regions get the same quality of care as anyone else.

For AUA students considering radiology, my advice is simple: Show up, be engaged, and prove you belong. Unlike other specialties, radiology isn't patient-facing during rotations, so you've got to stand out by being proactive, asking questions, and showing a strong work ethic.

I'm extremely proud to see the success of AUA alumni and the growth of AUA into one of the premier institutions in the Caribbean.

I would like to dedicate this article to my father, Paul Shaheen, whose unwavering support and encouragement made my journey to and through AUA possible.

*"Medicine isn't just a career,
it's a **promise to serve**,
no matter **where that takes you.**"*

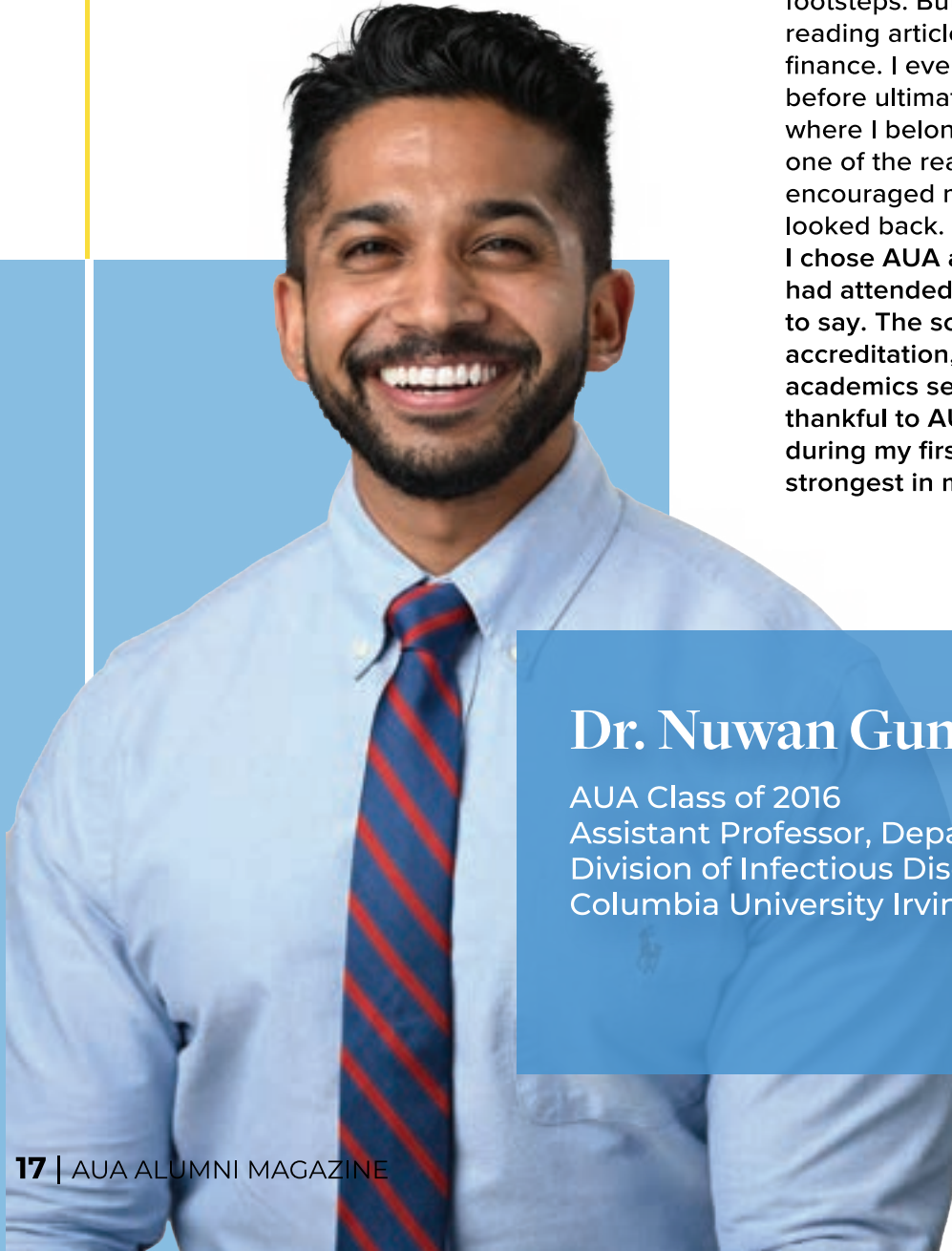
I was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, but my roots are in Sri Lanka. My parents immigrated in the late '70s, and they raised me with a deep sense of service.

One of my earliest and most defining memories is from a trip to Sri Lanka when I was a child.

My father took me to a small alleyway, pulled me aside, and said, "You were born with a silver spoon, but never forget your roots. Not everyone gets the chances you have, don't ever forget to continue to help them as you grow older." That moment shaped my life and my purpose.

Initially, I pursued business in college, thinking I might follow in my father's entrepreneurial footsteps. But I found myself spending more time reading articles on biology and medicine than on finance. I even considered dentistry for a while before ultimately deciding that medicine was where I belonged. My uncle, a psychiatrist and one of the reasons our family moved to the U.S., encouraged me down this path and I've never looked back.

I chose AUA after speaking with a friend who had attended and had nothing but good things to say. The school's modern campus, accreditation, and reputation for strong academics sealed the deal. I'm incredibly thankful to AUA for the friendships I made during my first year, many of which are still the strongest in my life.

A portrait of Dr. Nuwan Gunawardhana, MD, a man with dark hair and a beard, smiling. He is wearing a light blue dress shirt and a red and blue striped tie. The background is a solid light blue.

Dr. Nuwan Gunawardhana, MD

AUA Class of 2016

Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine,
Division of Infectious Diseases

Columbia University Irving Medical Center, New York

Most importantly, I found a mentor in Amar Shere, a TA who became my closest friend. He tutored me through medical school, supported me through board prep, and helped shape the way I learn. His guidance and dedication were a turning point and had a lasting impact on both my personal and professional journey.

My rotation in internal medicine at the University of Maryland was a turning point. The team there made learning feel effortless and enjoyable. I looked forward to every day, and by the end, I knew internal medicine was my calling. But I'd always been drawn to global health, and during residency at Florida Atlantic University, an attending planted the idea of infectious diseases. He reminded me that in underserved parts of the world, 70% of illnesses stem from infections. That was the lightbulb moment. It combined my clinical interests with my desire to serve abroad.

But the heart of my medical mission has always been global. Since my earliest days in medicine, I have been committed to providing care in underserved regions around the world. Through the Bicol Clinic Foundation, a non-profit medical organization, I have volunteered in rural Haiti and remote villages in Nepal. In these communities, I work alongside local providers treating everything from pediatric infections to chronic disease in the elderly. These missions require creativity and clinical intuition, often without access to labs or imaging. They have taught me the value of empathy, resourcefulness, and connection.

Today, I serve as Assistant Professor of Medicine at Columbia, where I teach students, residents, and fellows. I am also a hospital epidemiologist, leading efforts in infection prevention, and working on diagnostic and antibiotic stewardship. It's a demanding but deeply rewarding role. Alongside these responsibilities, I also treat patients in an infectious diseases ambulatory clinic at Columbia as part of my broader clinical duties. One of the most challenging parts is combatting misinformation, especially when it leads to vaccine hesitancy and outbreaks of preventable diseases like measles. Educating communities and rebuilding trust in medicine is more important than ever. Looking ahead, I hope to lead a medical mission to Sri Lanka and continue my work abroad every few years. I am especially passionate about reducing the stigma around HIV and educating patients about treatment options. Global health is not just something I do, it's who I am. Medicine gave me the skills, but it's the service that gives it meaning.

At the end of the day, I come home to my two dogs, a wonderfully supportive girlfriend, and a commitment to staying well through exercise and balance. Preventative care doesn't just apply to patients, it applies to us too. And if I had to do it all again, I wouldn't change a thing.





Dr. Peter N. Sayegh

“

Confidence is key.

The medicine I learned in AUA is no different from what's taught at Ivy League.

”

I come from a large family of doctors. My father was the oldest of eight siblings, and five of the brothers went on to become physicians. They left their home country, overcame financial and social challenges, yet remained steadfast in their pursuit of medicine. Witnessing their journey deeply impacted me. It wasn't just a career, it was about service, sacrifice, and giving back to the community. I felt inspired to continue that legacy.

Entering the field of medicine wasn't simple. I knew my grades weren't enough to get into a U.S. medical school, but I wasn't about to give up. Some of my peers thought it was American schools or nothing, but I didn't share that mindset. I had cousins and close friends at AUA, and they spoke highly of its academic program, USMLE prep, and solid match record. That made my decision clear.

Moving to Antigua was a big adjustment. I was shy, and being far from home with so many unfamiliar faces, I struggled. I'll never forget walking into Dr. Amarilli and Dr. Marcos's office when my confidence was wavering.



Dr. Peter N. Sayegh, MD

*AUA Class of 2016
Interventional Cardiologist
Founder, Cardiology of Hudson
Valley, New York*

They gave me some tough love and the reassurance I desperately needed. Those conversations made all the difference. From that moment on, I was fully committed. The diversity at AUA, both in faculty and the student body, taught me the importance of keeping an open mind. We had professors from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, India, and beyond, which showed me that medicine isn't a one-size-fits-all field. It's thoughtful, adaptable, and always evolving. This perspective was invaluable when I started my clinical rotations in New York alongside students from top U.S. schools. I never felt behind; I felt prepared. I matched into internal medicine at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York, part of the Northwell Health system. As one of the few Caribbean graduates there, I felt intimidated at first. However, once I got started, I quickly realized that the foundation I built at AUA was solid. The real difference was confidence. From the start, I was drawn to cardiology. My grandfather passed away from a heart attack at 35, and nearly every uncle on my father's side has had coronary stents or bypass surgery. I often wondered why no one in the family pursued cardiology, despite our medical history. That curiosity and personal connection ultimately guided me to where I am today. I am now board-certified in internal medicine and cardiovascular disease, and board-eligible in interventional cardiology. I founded Cardiology of Hudson Valley in New City, NY, where I split my time between outpatient care and the cardiac cath lab, performing invasive coronary angiography and placing coronary stents. I built this practice with one clear goal: to provide personalized, high-quality care to the same community my father served for 35 years. Running a private practice is demanding, especially as a solo physician, where everything falls on my shoulders. But the rewards are immense. I know my patients personally. I have the time to speak with them, explain why taking blood pressure medication matters, even if they feel fine. My focus is heavily on preventive cardiology. I always tell my patients to take control of what they can, smoking, cholesterol, diabetes, blood pressure, because these are the silent killers. My role isn't just to treat, but to educate. Work-life balance is essential. I plan my schedule carefully so I can be home for dinner with my family. I am married with two young children and a third on the way. My wife, who works full-time in politics, has been an incredible support throughout the journey of building this practice. She's truly been my lifeline. To future AUA students: don't underestimate the incredible opportunity you've been given. You belong here. Your education will prepare you just as thoroughly as any other school. Focus on learning the full scope of medicine first, and everything else will fall into place.

Dr. Maharshi Rajdev, MD, DABR

Valedictorian, AUA Class of 2016

Vascular & Interventional Radiologist

Medical Director at Akron Vascular Care
Ohio



“ *There hadn't been anything new in the dialysis fistula space for 50 years. Now we have a new device, and only a few of us in country are offering it.* ”



Medicine wasn't always a given for me. My sister and I were close to our aunt, a vascular surgeon, and I always admired her work. But I wasn't sure if I could do what she did. For a while, I thought I might pursue a PhD and stay in research. It wasn't until the end of undergrad, almost as I was graduating, that I decided I wanted to become a doctor. My undergraduate school wasn't very supportive of students going into medicine unless you were on the track early, and I hadn't taken the MCAT. I was considering taking time off, doing a master's degree, but then I came across AUA while researching Manipal University. I didn't know much about Caribbean schools back then. AUA had a semester starting in August, and I saw an opportunity to just begin. I joined as part of the first cohort under the new semester system, no expectations, just the determination to give it my best.

Once I got to the island, it was definitely a shift from what I was used to. But I put my head down and focused. I hadn't developed strong study habits in undergrad, so I had to learn how to really read, understand, and apply knowledge. I leaned into primary resources and textbooks, and over time, I found myself really enjoying it. The self-directed learning model at AUA worked well for me. I also became a TA and got deeply involved in the academic side of things—it helped reinforce what I was learning and gave me a real interest in teaching.

One of the turning points for me came when a radiologist from McMaster University, Canada visited AUA and gave lectures. I had always liked anatomy and pathology, and after those sessions, I knew I wanted to go into radiology. During clinical rotations in Atlanta, I got exposed to vascular surgery, and that's where I first encountered interventional radiology, a field that allowed me to combine my love for procedures with imaging.

After AUA, I matched into a surgical internship at the Mayo Clinic, then did my radiology residency at Case Western in Cleveland, where I was eventually chief resident.

I matched into an interventional radiology fellowship at the University of Virginia, one of the top programs in the country. After that, I joined the Cleveland Clinic as an attending, which was an intense but rewarding experience filled with high acuity cases, transplant patients, and complex interventions.

Eventually, I decided to move toward something more independent. I've always had a bit of a business mindset; my parents are small business owners and I wanted to build something of my own. Today, I'm the Medical Director of Akron Vascular Care in Munroe Falls. I oversee both the clinical and administrative sides of the center, managing patient care while also handling operations like hiring, compliance, marketing, and long-term planning. It is a different kind of responsibility but one I have come to enjoy, especially because it allows me to focus on areas, I am passionate about, including dialysis access, women's health, and limb salvage.

One of the most innovative things I've been involved in is the use of percutaneous endovascular techniques to create dialysis fistulas, a procedure that traditionally required surgery. This newer method is minimally invasive and has made a huge impact for patients. I'm one of only a few physicians in country performing this procedure. We're also performing a new procedure to treat knee pain from osteoarthritis using targeted embolization of abnormal arteries around the knee. This procedure known as GenuArtery Embolization (GAE) represents a potential paradigm shift in the management of knee osteoarthritis and we are one of the first to offer it in Ohio.

My wife and I are both physicians, so balancing schedules can be a challenge, but we make time to travel, play the occasional round of golf, work out together, and enjoy exploring the food scene in Cleveland.

AUA gave me the platform I needed. It taught me resilience, independence, and how to learn. For any student reading this, I'd say, don't worry if your path looks different. Stay focused, work hard, and be open to where the journey leads. You might just find a field you love and end up creating something meaningful out of it.



My family came to the United States from Ukraine when I was three and a half years old. I was raised in Brooklyn, New York, and I've spent most of my life there. I didn't start out in medicine. My undergraduate studies began in business and finance and after about two years, I realized that wasn't the path I wanted for myself. I switched over to pre-med and began working on my prerequisites for medical school. At that time, a friend of mine who was already studying at AUA-suggested I apply. I hadn't heard of AUA before then, but based on his recommendation, I looked into it, applied, interviewed, and was accepted. That's where it all began.

Dr. Demitri Podolski, MD

AUA Class of 2017

Pediatric Anesthesiologist

Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital, Florida



These kids didn't do anything to deserve what they're going through. Being there for them, in even the smallest way, is the most rewarding part of what I do.

Academically, AUA gave us a strong foundation. Of course, you can never fully predict what residency or clinical life will be like, but the baseline was solid. How far you go depends on how much you build on that foundation during clinicals and beyond. One professor who stood out to me at AUA was Dr. Bharati Balachandran. She taught immunology and microbiology, which were tough subjects for many in my class, but I thought she was phenomenal.

I did my clinical rotations in Brooklyn and Staten Island, and I completed my residency at Albany Medical Center in upstate New York.

When I began medical school, I didn't have a specific specialty in mind. Initially, I thought I wanted to be a surgeon. I was drawn to the operating room and even completed two sub-internships in surgery during my fourth year. But that's when I started to realize the surgical lifestyle didn't align with what I wanted long term. Around that time, I was exposed to anesthesiology, and it resonated with me. Anesthesiology kept me in the OR, which I enjoyed, but offered a different kind of role. I liked the physiology and pharmacology involved, and I appreciated the responsibility that came with being the one people rely on when things get serious. It felt like the right fit.

I've always enjoyed being around kids. Growing up, I was surrounded by cousins and my two nephews. So, working in pediatric anesthesiology came naturally to me. Today, I practice in South Florida, in the Fort Lauderdale and Miami area, as part of a private practice group. We occasionally have residents, and I work closely with CRNAs and anesthesiologist assistants, supervising cases or taking them on myself.

My scope of practice ranges from premature babies to patients up to 18 years old, and sometimes up to 30 if they have congenital conditions. What I find most rewarding is taking care of kids who have been dealt a tough hand. Many of them are born with congenital defects, injuries, tumors, or heart problems. They didn't do anything to deserve it, they just got unlucky. Being there for them, even if I'm not fixing the problem directly, means I'm part of helping them live more normal lives.

For balance, I go to the gym four to five times a week. I cook, try different recipes, and check out new restaurants, I'm a big foodie. I play basketball and billiards and try to make time for friends when I have a day off.

One of the great things about anesthesiology is that it allows for a healthy work-life balance. AUA gave me the structure and flexibility I needed to get here, and I'm grateful for that.

“

REPRESENTATION MATTERS

*When patients see someone who looks like them,
it builds trust and creates space for healing.*

”



Dr. Sheenay Pryce, MD

AUA Class of 2019
Primary Care Physician
ProHealth Physicians, Connecticut
Assistant Clinical Professor of
Family Medicine
University of Connecticut College of Medicine

I always knew I wanted to make a difference, and growing up in the Bronx, I saw first hand how difficult it could be for families in my community to access quality health care. That experience, combined with my love for science, set me on the path to medicine. But it was more than just a career choice. I also understood the value of representation. Seeing a physician who looks like you can build trust, open communication, and ultimately improve outcomes.

When it came time to choose a medical school, AUA stood out to me. I was drawn to its strong academic foundation, the variety of clinical rotation opportunities in the United States, and its clear commitment to diversity. My family is originally from Jamaica, so adjusting to life on the island came naturally. I had visited the Caribbean often as a child, and I even had family nearby in Antigua. Still, I chose to stay in student housing to be close to campus and spend more time in the library, which quickly became a second home.

AUA gave me more than an education. It gave me a support system. I met classmates who are still close friends today. We studied together, leaned on each other, and kept each other grounded. That sense of community carried me through the rigorous academics and challenging clinical rotations.

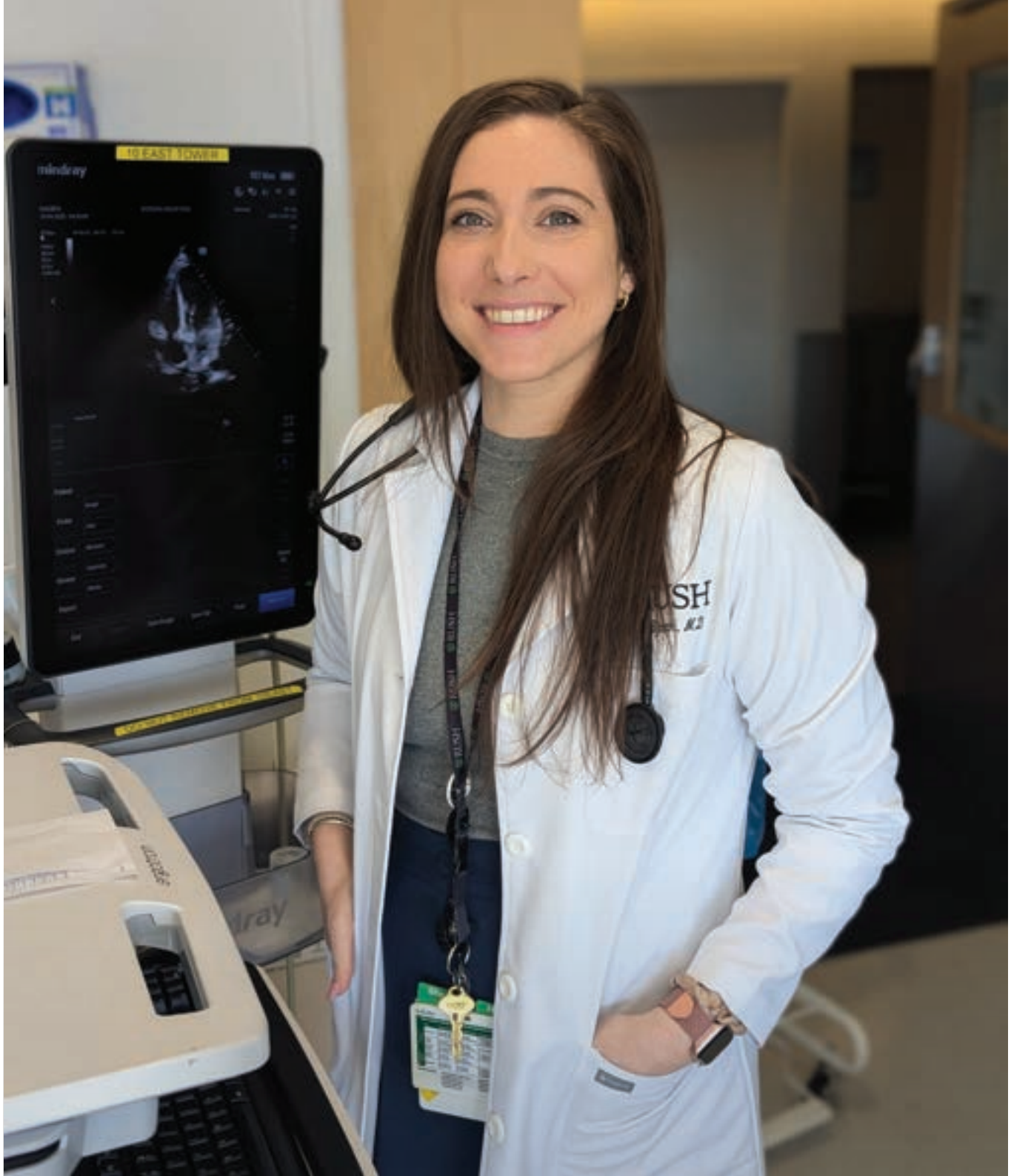
Initially, I went to medical school thinking I would specialize in OB-GYN. But during rotations, I fell in love with family medicine. It allowed me to work with a full spectrum of patients, from infants to the elderly. I could still do some obstetrics, while also managing chronic conditions and forming lasting relationships. That continuity of care is what truly resonated with me.

I completed my residency at CarePoint Health Hoboken University Medical Center in New Jersey. From there, I joined ProHealth Physicians in Connecticut, where I now practice outpatient primary care. I treat patients managing long-term conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and COPD. I am also an Assistant Clinical Professor of Family Medicine at the University of Connecticut. Medical students rotate through my office, and I provide mentorship and clinical guidance. At first, teaching was intimidating. But it has turned into one of the most fulfilling parts of my job. The students keep me sharp and bring fresh perspectives to patient care.

Family medicine has proven to be everything I hoped for. It gives me the variety I craved and the balance I need. I knew I didn't want to work in a hospital setting long term. Outpatient care gives me a consistent schedule and the ability to disconnect when the day is done. Though that is easier said than done. One of the biggest challenges I face is setting boundaries. Even on days off, I find myself checking labs or responding to patient messages. As physicians, we are wired to serve. But self-care is critical too. For me, that means spa days, monthly massages, and travel. Last year I explored Greece and several Caribbean islands. These are the ways I recharge and keep showing up for my patients.

There are moments in practice that remind me why I chose this path. One patient came in with hearing loss. When I examined her ears, I found bits of cotton lodged deep inside. After a simple ear lavage, her hearing returned, and she was beyond grateful. To me, it was a small fix. To her, it was life-changing. Those moments, however small, reaffirm my purpose.

To future AUA students: find your people. Your tribe will carry you through the hard days. Take full advantage of your education, seek mentorship, and explore every specialty with an open mind. Family medicine is about connection and community. If that speaks to you, lean into it. And most of all, believe in your ability to make an impact.



Dr. Sarah Bjork, MD

AUA Class of 2018
Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine Fellow
Incoming Faculty, Montefiore Medical Center,
New York

“
*I've learned that while
we can't save every patient,
we can always deliver compassion and dignity.*”

I decided I wanted to be a doctor in eighth grade. It started as a school project where we had to envision our lives at thirty. I declared then and there that I would become a doctor. There was no plan B, except maybe marine biology, but my heart was already set. I loved science and wanted to work with people. Medicine was the perfect combination.

At the University of Rochester, where half my class was pre-med, the competition was intense, but it pushed me. After graduation, I applied to med schools with strong grades and MCAT scores, but was told I needed more life experience. I didn't want to wait a year or two. I was ready.

That led me to AUA. I interviewed in the New York office after a snowstorm nearly stranded me in Europe. Sitting in Bob Gelles' office, looking out at the Statue of Liberty, it just felt right. The interview was warm and focused on my potential, not just my application.

Moving to Antigua was a big change. I had never lived outside New York and suddenly I was on a Caribbean Island, learning how to live on my own. But the island grew on me quickly. I found a great apartment, made close friends, and came to love the food and the beauty of the place.

AUA was structured and demanding. We were told early on that not everyone would make it, we had to earn our place. That motivated me. One professor who stood out was Dr. Amirali. He was tough but believed in his students. He pushed me in anatomy, and his “star in your pocket” speech stayed with me. Another faculty member who made a difference was Dr. Lois. He always reminded me that hard work and humility would take me further than any credential.

During clinical rotations in Baltimore and New York, I often felt overprepared. Sometimes I was the only AUA student, but there was a shared camaraderie among Caribbean grads that was incredibly supportive. I never felt less than anyone else. We were all there to learn and grow.

I matched into internal medicine at Drexel and began residency at Hahnemann, but within months the hospital closed. It was a shock, and navigating that transition became one of the most difficult challenges I've faced in training. I reached out to my AUA mentors, and within days, I had support from Dr. Bell and others helping me land on my feet in New York. I transitioned into a new program, picked up right where I left off, and eventually matched into my first-choice fellowship in pulmonary and critical care medicine.

That path has now led me back home. I'm joining the faculty at Montefiore in New York. I'll be focusing on pulmonary medicine, including a subspecialty in bronchiectasis, as well as practicing sleep medicine. My time in the ICU has been incredibly meaningful. I've learned that while we can't save every patient, we can always deliver compassion and dignity.

Work-life balance is something I protect intentionally. Whether it's spending time with my family, enjoying good food, or just getting outside, I make space to reset so I can show up fully for my patients and for myself.

For future AUA students who are considering internal medicine, keep your mind open and your training broad. You might go into it thinking you'll specialize, but every area you explore, from cardiology to endocrinology to pulmonary, will show up in your daily practice. Internal medicine gives you the foundation to care for the whole patient. And most importantly, trust yourself. You've already made it this far, and you are more capable than you know.



Dr. Keishla Figueroa,

AUA Class of 2020

Chief Resident of Psychiatry

BronxCare Health Systems

New York

Dr. Keishla Figueroa, MD

I was born and raised in Puerto Rico and completed my undergraduate studies there. Puerto Rico only has four medical schools, and with limited seats, it's highly competitive. After being waitlisted, I had to make a decision: either gamble on another application cycle or move forward. A friend told me about AUA in Antigua, and after researching it, I applied. The acceptance came quickly, and I knew it was time to begin.

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The connection you build with patients in psychiatry is unlike any other specialty. It's a privilege to be part of their journey.

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Moving from Puerto Rico to Antigua wasn't a difficult transition. The Caribbean lifestyle, the weather, even the warmth of the people felt familiar. The only real difference was the language. I grew up speaking Spanish, but being bilingual made it an easy adjustment. What stood out most was how much AUA felt like home, almost instantly. Even with Hurricane Maria hitting Puerto Rico while I was in Antigua, I learned that with preparation and support, storms pass and there is nothing to be afraid of. Academically, AUA delivered a strong foundation. The curriculum was well-structured and focused on high-yield material. Med 5 wasn't a shock for me, because I had already encountered much of that content throughout basic sciences. The block exams were challenging, but they prepared me well. Faculty like Dr. Culling and the late Dr. Steve Glasser left a lasting impression. Dr. Glasser, in particular, had a way of breaking down complex neuro concepts into simple, memorable lessons. His passion for teaching was contagious.

All of my clinical rotations were in New York. I spent time at Interfaith, Kingsbrook, Wyckoff, Staten Island, and Yonkers. Initially, I wanted to do OB-GYN. But during my psychiatry rotation at Interfaith, I unexpectedly fell in love with the specialty. New York City is very diverse, with a large Spanish-speaking community, and I was the only one in my rotation who spoke Spanish. I connected deeply with a patient who had dementia and was also from Puerto Rico. The connection we built showed me how unique and rewarding patient relationships in psychiatry can be.

Now as Chief Resident at BronxCare, a typical day involves my own rotations, seeing patients, and handling administrative tasks like call schedules, moonlighting shifts, coverage for sick calls, and meetings with nursing, social work, and security. I also create intern schedules, communicate with other departments, and oversee AUA student rotations. It's a huge learning curve, balancing being a doctor and an administrator.

Residency is intense, and being away from family in Puerto Rico has been my biggest challenge. Thankfully, my husband, who's been with me since mid-med school, has been my anchor. Still, there's no substitute for home, and I hope to return and practice in Puerto Rico in the future.

I'll be working as an attending in Collaborative Care at Wayne Memorial Community Health Centers in Pennsylvania. This approach brings psychiatry directly into primary care settings, helping to close the gaps that leave so many patients untreated. It aligns perfectly with my mission: to serve and advocate for the underserved. In the future, I might explore forensic psychiatry or consult liaison psychiatry, but for now, I'm focused on collaborative care.

Work-life balance in psychiatry is better than many other specialties, but the emotional weight can be heavy. Many patients face complex challenges beyond their psychiatric diagnoses, trauma, addiction, medical comorbidities, and more. I've learned to set boundaries, and making intentional time with my husband a non-negotiable part of my week.

To future AUA students, my advice would be, stay curious and open-minded. I almost overlooked psychiatry, and now I can't imagine doing anything else. Treat each patient as a whole person, not just a diagnosis. Unlike other fields in medicine, psychiatry doesn't rely on vital signs or blood work. Be empathic and committed to being patient centric.

Dr. Sera Chun, MD

AUA Class of 2020
Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist
Texas



I always knew I didn't want to take a gap year after college. That's what first led me to explore Caribbean medical schools and ultimately to AUA. What stood out about AUA was the smaller class sizes and the emphasis on small group learning, like the problem-based learning sessions. It gave the campus a tight-knit, collaborative feel, and I appreciated AUA's holistic approach to admissions. I didn't feel reduced to just numbers on an application. I felt seen.

Transitioning into medical school was a steep learning curve. What had worked for me in college wasn't cutting it anymore. I had to completely rethink my study habits. It was a process of trial and error, experimenting with new techniques, attending extra tutorial sessions with TAs, and making the most of post-lab anatomy hours. Those resources really made a difference, and I look back with gratitude for the support structure AUA offered us outside the classroom.

The transition from basic sciences to clinical sciences came with its own set of challenges. At the time, I didn't fully understand why the Comp exam was a necessary step before Step 1. Now, I see it as a crucial checkpoint; it helped ensure we were truly ready. Once I entered clinicals, I learned quickly that it wasn't just about what you knew, but how you presented yourself: showing up early, being prepared, and demonstrating professionalism at every moment.

During my rotations, I found mentors who left a lasting impression. Dr. Ayodeji Jolayemi, the psychiatry clerkship director at Interfaith Medical Center, was one of them. His open-door policy and willingness to let us take ownership of our learning stood out. I even returned for a sub-internship with him, where I got the chance to lead a teaching session for third-year students using a jeopardy-style game I created to prepare them for the psychiatry shelf. It was an early glimpse into how much I enjoyed teaching and mentoring.

Another unforgettable mentor was Dr. Lemma, the pediatrics rotation director at Richmond University. She had this maternal energy and genuinely cared about our growth, not just as doctors, but as people. I'll never forget the letter of recommendation she wrote me that helped shape my path forward.

Today, I'm a first-year Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Fellow at UTHealth, rotating through different hospitals in the Texas Medical Center. Right now, I'm on a substance abuse rotation, working with adolescents in subacute rehab. Other rotations include inpatient psychiatry, walk-in crisis evaluations, and continuity clinics. What I find most rewarding is being part of a child's development, having the opportunity to positively influence their growth, and working with their families, schools, and broader care teams. It takes a village, and I love being part of that support system.

I've also been actively involved with national organizations like the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP). I'd advise students interested in psychiatry to get involved early.

These networks offer mentorship, research opportunities, and a chance to demonstrate your commitment to the field well before residency.

There are still areas within psychiatry that I'm eager to explore more deeply, particularly subspecialties like eating disorders and neurodevelopmental disorders, including autism spectrum conditions. These are part of the second-year fellowship rotations, and I'm looking forward to gaining more hands-on experience in those clinics.

When I'm not working, I prioritize balance, traveling when I can, staying connected with friends from medical school, and keeping in touch with my support system. Planning vacations gives me something to look forward to and helps keep me grounded. Though I'm originally from Korea, my whole family lives here in the U.S. now. Their support has been my anchor throughout this journey.

AUA gave me the foundation, the resilience, and the mentorship I needed to thrive, not just academically, but personally. After my fellowship, I hope to become a consult-liaison psychiatrist with a hybrid practice model. I'm not sure where the road will take me next, but thanks to AUA, I know I'll be ready.

“

What I find most rewarding is being part of a child's development, having the opportunity to positively influence their growth, and working with their families, schools, and broader care teams.

It takes a village, and I love being part of that support system.

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AUA Convention Center Hosted Prestigious UN Conference

CAMPUS EVENTS



SIDS CONFERENCE



In a moment of immense pride for AUA, the university's new conference and learning center served as a key venue for the United Nations' 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS), a once-in-a-decade global event.

Held in May 2024, the conference brought together over 5,000 delegates from around the world to AUA's state-of-the-art 1,000 plus seat facility. The event centered on critical discussions surrounding sustainability, climate resilience, and regional development, topics of vital importance to the Caribbean and beyond.

This milestone not only showcased AUA's world-class infrastructure but also reinforced the institution's growing global stature as a premier destination for international academic and diplomatic engagement.

Indian Minister Pabitra Margherita Plants Symbolic Tree at AUA, Strengthening Global Ties and Promoting Sustainability



In October 2024, Hon. Pabitra Margherita, Minister of State for External Affairs and Textiles of India, planted a symbolic tree at AUA, marking a significant moment in the university's commitment to environmental sustainability and international cooperation.

AUA was proud to host Minister Margherita, along with High Commissioner Dr. Amit Telang and other distinguished Indian officials, on campus. This meaningful event underscored the importance of strengthening global ties while promoting sustainable practices.

AUA Hosts 12th GAPIO Mid-Year Conference



In July 2024, AUA had the distinct honor of hosting the 12th Mid-Year Conference of the Global Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (GAPIO) on its campus.

Held on July 15–16, the event brought together physicians from 55 countries for engaging discussions on the evolving landscape of global healthcare. A central panel focused on the role of offshore medical education and how Caribbean institutions like AUA are helping address the global physician shortage. Key highlights included insightful addresses by AUA President Dr. Peter Bell and Associate Dean of Global Health Dr. Walwyn. In his closing remarks, His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams, GCMG, Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda, urged GAPIO members and global physicians to remain committed to advancing medical education and international collaboration.



DR. RYLAN CICCARELLO, MD

AUA Class of 2020

Consultation-Liaison Psychiatrist, Orlando Health, FL

From Wildman to Family Man

“When I’m not working, I’m all in on family time, from park adventures to zoo days with my two-year-old daughter. Watching her light up around animals is pure joy, and I can’t wait to see her at the beach for the first time this year.

When it’s just me and my wife, we love to travel and explore new places, but my heart’s always in the woods. My family calls me “Wildman” because I love to hunt and soak in the quiet moments when nature comes alive. We head to our family place in Georgia a few times a year. It’s our little slice of heaven.”



DR. STEVEN BUSTAMANTE, MD, AAHIVS

AUA Class of 2021

*Family Medicine Physician & HIV Specialist
UNICARE Community Health Center, Pomona, CA
Family Medicine Resident
Loma Linda University Medical Center – Murrieta*

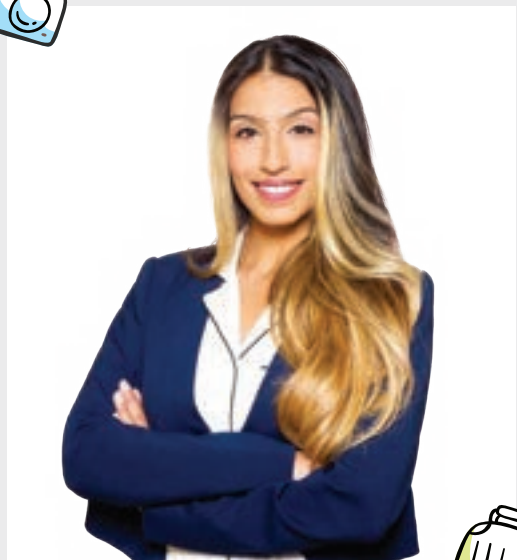
From Clinic to Curtain Call

“I have taken an interest in musicals and Broadway. It is my way to escape from the busy life of work with the powerful performances, the soaring ballads, and the catchy tunes that provide an outlet for relaxation that feels both rejuvenating and fulfilling.

”



spotlight



DR. ESHA JAIN, MD



AUA Class of 2021

Family Medicine Resident Physician
Cooper University Hospital,
Camden, New Jersey

Tennis, Travel, and the Match Game.

“I love being a match mentor, helping others succeed is the best kind of win.

Each day, I carve out 15-30 minutes just for me, whether it's tennis, a quick workout, or a dance party in my kitchen.

Biggest obsession? Travel. One international trip a year is my rule. I'm all about history, culture, and collecting stories from around the world.”



DR. BILAL KHAN, MD, MBA

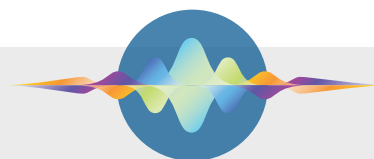
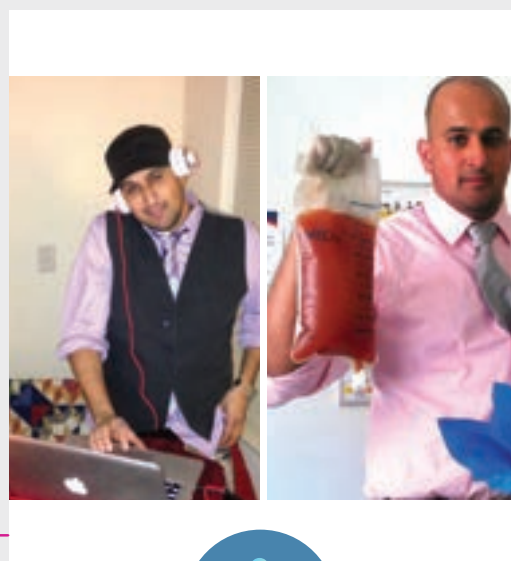
AUA Class of 2011

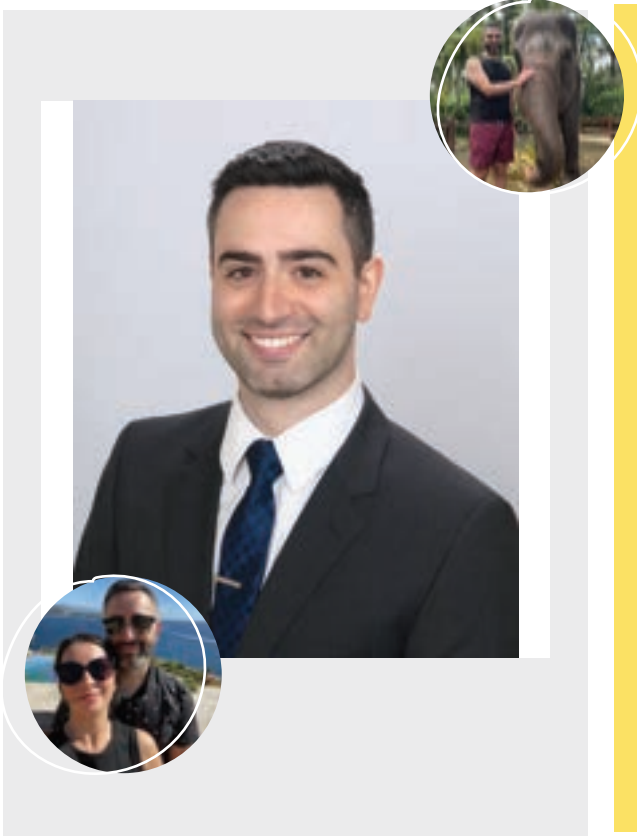
Pulmonary-Critical Care & Sleep Medicine
Cooperman-Barnabas Medical Center (CBMC)

From Ventilators to Vinyl, Keeping the Beat Alive.

“By day, I'm a doctor on call.
By night, I'm behind the DJ booth.”

Music is my creative outlet, and nothing resets my energy like dropping a great track after a long shift.





DR. PAUL COUTO, MD

AUA Class of 2019

*Neuroradiology & Interventional Fellow (2024-25)
Brigham and Women's Hospital
Harvard Medical School, Boston*

Passports, Plates, and Parenthood

“

I love to travel alongside my gorgeous wife, exploring different cultures and cuisines along the way. We've got a bun in the oven, so while our globetrotting may pause for now, I can't wait to explore the world through the eyes of our future little travel buddy.

”



DR. ALLISON FOSTER, MD

AUA Class of 2021

*Cardiology fellow
(Finishing June 2027)*

Chasing Flavor Off-Duty



“One thing I love to do in my free time is explore new restaurants with my fiancé. From hole-in-the-wall gems to fine dining adventures, discovering new flavors is our favorite way to unwind.”



spotlight



DR. ARSH PAL, MD

AUA Class of 2018

Infectious Diseases & Critical Care Fellow
(Finishing June 2025)
Future Attending Intensivist, Ontario, Canada

Run, Read, Tee Off, Reset, Repeat

“Running, reading, and the occasional round of golf, that’s my kind of reset. On my days off, I hit the trails or the green when the weather’s good. It’s the perfect antidote to long inpatient hours. Whether it’s a long run or getting lost in a good book, it clears my head and gets me ready to show up strong for my patients.”



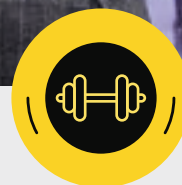
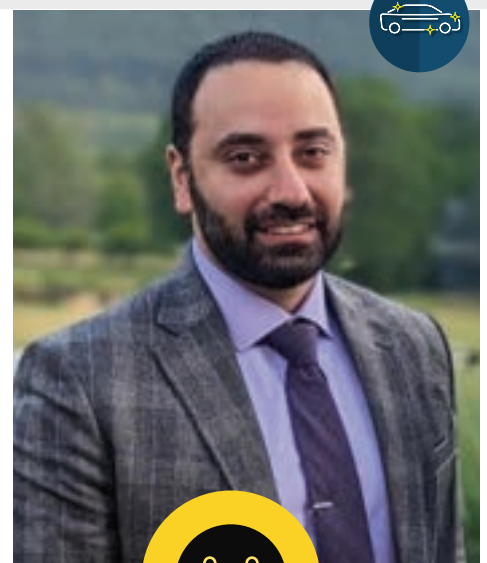
DR. SALMAN KHAN, MD

AUA Class of 2017

Pulmonary and Critical Care Attending Physician
St. Luke's University Health Network
Clinical Assistant Professor (Adjunct),
Department of General Internal Medicine
Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University,
Philadelphia, PA

Polish, Power Lifts, and Procrastination

“Auto detailing is my therapy. There’s something satisfying about polishing my car to a mirror shine. I also try to work out regularly... but let’s be honest, I’m usually looking for creative excuses to skip the gym. Balance, right?”



THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ANTIGUA ALUMNI ORGANIZATION (AUAAO)



Dr. John Riggs

*Vice President
AUAAO*



Par Prem Kumar

*Director
AUAAO*

Welcome New Alumnus to the AUAAO!

Under the leadership of our new Vice President, Dr. John Riggs, and Director, Par PremKumar, the AUAAO is pleased to introduce a refreshed approach to alumni engagement. These initiatives are designed to foster enduring connections, mutual support, and greater involvement within the AUA community.

Key Initiatives Include:

- Updating and maintaining the alumni database of 4,000+ graduates.
- Continuing the quarterly alumni newsletter featuring campus updates and alumni achievements.
- Involving alumni in webinars, college fairs, and presentations in support of Admissions.
- Contributing alumni success stories for AUA's marketing and digital outreach.
- Supporting student special interest groups through alumni teaching and mentorship.
- Publishing the annual alumni magazine highlighting milestones and accomplishments.
- Facilitating alumni-led sessions for newly admitted student cohorts.
- Providing free alumni access to library resources, including publications and periodicals.
- Engaging alumni in interviewing new applicants.
- Appointing new Class Communications Chairs to help AUAAO leadership keep classmates informed about reunions, hub city receptions, networking events, and mentoring opportunities.
- Launching the new Medical Alumni Match program to connect recent graduates with mentors by specialty and location.
- Honoring alumni through awards and formal recognition by the Alumni Awards Committee.

We invite all interested alumni to contribute their time, expertise, and enthusiasm to these initiatives.

To get involved, please contact Par PremKumar at alumni@auamed.org



OUR MISSION IS **YOUR SUCCESS** OUR STORY IS **YOUR STORY**

At American University of Antigua (AUA), we take pride in each and every medical professional that graduates from this institution. Each of you are the reason we exist, and we are forever grateful for your continued support of AUA and our vision to create the medical leaders of tomorrow. We are who we are because of your commitment to quality medicine.



Learn more about the
AUA Alumni Association
visit www.aualumni.org