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UVA doctor earns prestigious faculty development award



By Emily Dinning The [School of Medicine](#)’s Shannon Moonah, MD, has received the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Harold Amos Medical Faculty Development Program Award in recognition of his work in medical school and residency. The award is offered to faculty members of historically disadvantaged backgrounds with the intention of helping them achieve a senior rank in academic medicine and, in turn, furthering diversity in the realm of medicine.

Award recipients serve as a support network and role models for underrepresented populations as they progress through academic medicine. Moonah joins three other people at the UVA School of Medicine who have received the award previously, including the school’s dean, David S. Wilkes, MD.

“I am truly honored that I was selected for this award and am so humbled to be in such an elite company,” Moonah said. “The award is a reflection of the strong mentorship that I have and continue to receive.”

ABOUT MOONAH

Moonah is completing a fellowship, a more specialized training after residency, in infectious disease. He plans to continue his research in parasitology, investigating the immune response and the effects of the immune system in contributing to the disease processes occurring in the body while under attack.

“This award is huge in several ways, because there’s no way that you could even see patients and have the time to do research significantly, since you’re competing with PhD candidates and other scientists. The program is also huge because of the network, where you meet scientists in your field and multidisciplinary,” Moonah said.

DIVERSITY IN MEDICINE

About 25 percent of the UVA School of Medicine’s students come from underrepresented backgrounds, well above the national average of around 15 percent. However, school leaders continue to strive to embrace diversity in all its forms.

“Diversity encompasses the whole breadth of the human experience, whether it’s race, gender, sexual orientation, work experience, military experience and such. Really, what you’re looking for is people who bring in ideas outside of what people might consider to be the mainstream,” said Greg Townsend, MD, associate dean of diversity at the medical school and a former recipient of the award.

The lack of diversity in medicine and academia begins at a young age, according to Townsend, because of a lack of mentors and role models, an issue the Amos award seeks to address. The award essentially functions as a four-year grant and helps recipients advance their careers as physician-scientists.

THE AMOS AWARD

The [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) aims to improve the health and healthcare of all Americans, seeking primarily to help improve the number and quality of healthcare professionals. The foundation was established in 1983 to help develop minority physician-scientists.

Each year, a dozen or so recipients are selected from many applicants and are then funded to do research for four years, similar to a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The program is structured such that recipients are able to hit the ground running in academic medicine, thanks to the amount of work they have accomplished in the four years as well as to the support of the program’s network of alumni and mentors.

“Career development awards, such as the Amos award, are grants that provide support and protected time to qualified medical faculty, propelling them into the next generation of physician-scientists. Physician-scientists play a crucial role in the translation of basic scientific findings into clinical interventions aimed at improving patient outcomes. They also serve as role models for trainees and junior faculty,” Moonah said.

The program has more than 250 alumni, 80 percent of whom remain in academic medicine and three of whom are current NIH directors. The four people at the UVA School of Medicine who have received the award are Wilkes, Townsend, Moonah and Ayotunde Dokun, MD.

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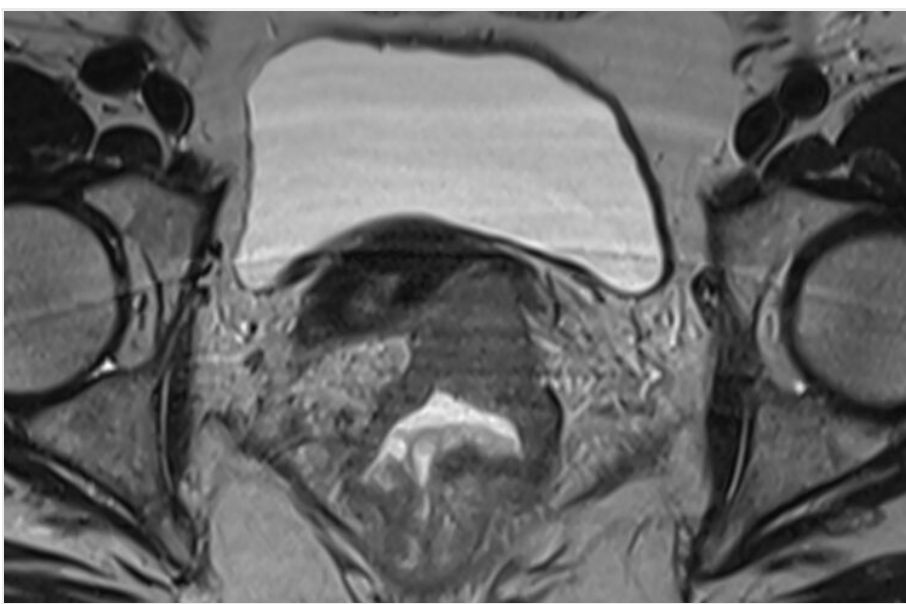
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