

Committed to advancing LGBTQ+ care? This program's looking for you

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If you're a physician with leadership zeal, a passion for public health, and a strong interest in improving LGBTQ+ health care in the U.S., then you just may be well suited to help.

The AMA Foundation (AMAF) has awarded a \$750,000 grant to the University of Wisconsin–Madison School of Medicine and Public Health (UWSMPH), making it the inaugural recipient of the foundation's National LGBTQ+ Fellowship Program.

As the physician charged with helming the program, Elizabeth Petty, MD, has big ideas for the fellowship. They center on emphasizing clinical, educational and research initiatives.

“The cultural change is going to take time but there are some acute things we will be able to do in the first few years to change the landscape,” said Dr. Petty, senior associate dean of academic affairs at UWSMPH. “Even being awarded this fellowship has increased the awareness of issues in LGBTQ+ health.”

The UWSMPH fellowship will be awarded annually to one physician each year starting in summer 2022. As the school begins its search for its first fellow, Dr. Petty offered some insight on how the fellowship is shaping up.

Creating a workforce to meet LGBTQ+ needs

“LGBTQ+ patients face tremendous challenges in navigating our health system because of systemic barriers fueled by malignant narratives that undermine equity for the LGBTQ+ community,” according to AMA Chief Health Equity Officer Aletha Maybank, MD, MPH.

“Research shows more than 70% of LGBTQ+ youth have reported discriminatory behavior, including from health professionals, and roughly one in five LGBTQ+ adults say they avoid medical care due to fear of discrimination,” she wrote in a recent AMA Leadership Viewpoints column about how the new AMA Foundation initiative will boost LGBTQ+ health care.

Dr. Petty spoke of negative stereotypes and patient-physician misunderstandings as two barriers to the provision of adequate care to the LGBTQ+ population.

To address that, UWSMPH’s fellowship positions are integrated, meaning physicians in the position will split their time between primary care and public health. In terms of how that will work in the clinical realm, Dr. Petty envisions fellows treating patients and helping them navigate their care with specialists.

“The fellow will be involved in helping us shape the clinical landscape,” Dr. Petty said. “We are really fortunate that we have some fantastic faculty in pediatric medicine and family medicine who can help mentor that are very involved in gender-services medicine.”

Scholarly contribution

The second portion of the fellowship—focusing on public health—will involve fellows’ participation in research and scholarly activity. Depending on a fellow’s background, that work could include clinical health services research, public health research or clinical translation research.

“Each fellow will continue to expand the knowledge in the field as it relates to health equity,” Dr. Petty said. “Health equity is really the framework that we are striving for in all the work. We’re looking to optimize the care of patients and address health equity issues more broadly.”

In terms of addressing the field on a broader level, Dr. Petty hopes the fellow can create a curriculum that can be disseminated to medical schools and residency programs across the country.

The ideal candidate for the fellowship is a physician with a background and interest in public health and primary care training. Beyond that, there are other intangibles that Dr. Petty believe could make someone a fit.

“We are looking for leaders. We are looking for people who demonstrate cultural humility and people with the spark and passion to make a difference,” she said.

This fellowship, under the prevue of the AMAF Board of Directors, is guided by the AMAF Fellowship Commission on LGBTQ+ Health and the LGBTQ+ Honor Fund Founding Donors. The former group includes a cross-section of physicians, LGBTQ+ thought leaders, experts in education, and others led by John D. Evans, the noted philanthropist and business executive who co-founded C-SPAN.