

Stories of Engagement

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PCAT Members Impacting Lives at Local Hospital

By Marisa Knox

The Patient Care Advocate Team (PCAT), founded by Dr. Justine Waldman of Cayuga Medical Center, is a volunteer program offered jointly by the Cornell Public Service Center and the Cayuga Medical Center. PCAT gives Cornell undergraduate students real-world hospital and patient-care experience along with health and medical career advising.

With this goal in mind, Dr. Waldman developed the PCAT program in September 2014 to foster community engagement with premed students and give them experience in the Emergency Department setting. The other role of the program was to introduce volunteers to the importance of patient comfort and advocacy.

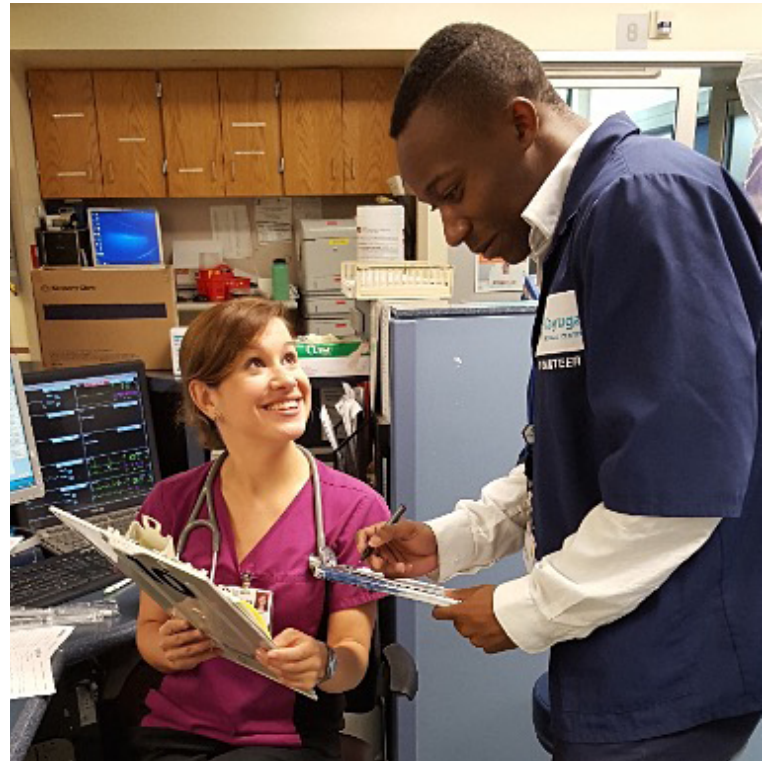
“Often seen as a critical community service,” the Emergency Department’s mission is to deliver, “expert, compassionate care for people who are experiencing medical emergencies”.



Dr. Waldman, courtesy of
Cayuga Medical Center

“My purpose as a doctor is to always be sure I am doing the right thing for the patient. I have learned with time, that often this means meeting the patient where they are at and offering the care they want to receive, not the care I want to give,” says Dr.

Waldman, who specializes in Emergency Medicine



PCAT member consults with Cayuga Medical Center staff member

at Cayuga Medical Center.

In the past three years, PCAT has grown into a successful, distinguished and provable collaborative program that is able to address key areas of focus in medicine and issues in public health. Dr. Waldman says, “because of the involvement with Cornell’s Public Service Center we have been able to give the students a sense of what it means to treat all patients with respect.” By partnering with the Cornell Public Service Center, Cornell undergraduate students have gained structured learning and leadership development, and learned to challenge their understanding on the complex social issues surrounding health care policy, and

practices.

Kansas Underwood, RN, saw the benefits the program had in the ER and brought it to the departments under her, Palliative Care and Telemetry. Her stance on care echoes Dr. Waldman's. According to her "what [the students] learn is that everybody's story is the most important story." The students act as advocates for the patients and help bring comfort to some of the most difficult parts of a person's life. This reflects the changing philosophy about a healthcare provider's role. Increasingly the patient has been given a larger say in his or her care, the PCAT students act to support the patients.

With the wide range of clientele at the medical center, the students work to find what each patient needs. With the amount of Cornell graduates at the center, there is a unique opportunity for the students to make meaningful connections. With this specific group Underwood saw that "[the patients] got to really self reflect and talk about their history, which makes people feel proud".

A typical day on duty for a PCAT student in the Emergency Department is very versatile and fast paced. Unlike the Palliative and Telemetry units that has the same patients for an extended period of time, the Emergency Department's patients are constantly changing, and students are always building new relationships. PCAT students do three-hour shifts every week and go around every 45 minutes into authorized rooms to check on patients. Although the program is heavily patient-focused, students are also able to gain experience interacting and working alongside other medical care professionals.

Cornell students Cynthia Linn '18 and Nader Hashweh '18 both joined the PCAT program early on in their Cornell careers. They praise how their involvement in the PCAT program has affirmed

their reasoning for wanting to go into the medical field. As a premed student, Nader mentioned how many medical schools look for clinical experience from applicants, and the PCAT program was a great way for him to stay a summer in Ithaca and gain experience working in the Emergency Department at Cayuga Medical Center. As leader on the PCAT Student Advisory Board, Nader stated, "the PCAT program allows for direct interaction with the patients and provides a different experience than typically shadowing a physician."

Both Cynthia and Nader described gaining relationships, cultural confidence, communication, and interpersonal skills from interacting with patients from diverse demographics and backgrounds. The Emergency Department can feel uncomfortable and lonely to patients admitted, and PCAT strives "to provide patients comfort", said Cynthia.



Cynthia Linn '18

To prospective students thinking about joining PCAT, Cynthia and Nader say, "Don't be intimidated to talk to patients. Don't be scared, go out and try, and embrace discomfort."