Meet ‘Team Mac’

Family advocates for people with Down syndrome at Cases of Patients

For the Austin family, the best clinic visits start with “Hi, Mac, how are you?”

Mac Austin, a 15-year-old boy who loves roller coasters and has been to Disney World three times, has Down syndrome. But sometimes in the clinic, providers simply start speaking to his family first.

In November 2018, Mac, mother Lexy, father Russ, brother Griffin and best friend Delaney Wepking— together known as “Team Mac”—presented for the fourth time at the University of Wisconsin–Madison Physician Assistant (PA) Program’s Cases of Patients series.

Launched in 2012, Cases of Patients brings together patients, families and interprofessional learners to explore the psychosocial, cultural and emotional aspects that accompany clinical care. This session attracted 239 students from four disciplines: physician assistant studies, nursing, genetic counseling and social work.

And that day, the Austin family helped them understand how making eye contact and greeting Mac directly is more than just a courtesy. It signals an awareness of and respect for him as a person first—an essential step in addressing his medical needs.

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I would like you to know that I am funny. I am smart. I am loved. If you give me a chance, I will surprise you.

—Mac Austin

Eye-Opening Experience

After hearing the family’s story, attendees broke into groups to discuss four aspects of care for people with Down syndrome: values and ethics, roles and responsibilities, communication and teamwork.

Learner evaluations showed that, across all disciplines, the session was particularly effective in exposing them to the unique needs of people with Down syndrome, and helping them understand the importance of seeking a patient’s story.

“This is an invaluable experience that you simply can’t get from a textbook,” wrote one participating PA student. “Today I learned about the importance of communicating with social workers and the role I will play in finding specialists for patients with Down syndrome,” wrote another.

A nursing student wrote, “It was really eye-opening to hear the perspective of a parent who is also a health professional.”

“I’ve learned so much, and we can do better,” reflects Lexy Austin. “Our family works together to make changes in the lives of others, whether they’re clinicians going into practice, or the future patients and families they may encounter.”

Students Win Wisconsin Without Borders Award

PA Program students Katelyn Lobnow (on left) and Lorena Perez-Hernandez (on right) received a Wisconsin Without Borders Service-Learning Award on April 10, 2019, for globally engaged scholarship through Mission H.E.L.P. Belize. For eight years, the PA Program has partnered with Peacework to travel to rural and impoverished areas of Belize to provide cervical cancer screenings and sustainable medical care to several small villages. The $1,000 award prize will go toward the PA Program’s next trip to Belize.
From Prairie to Peak

Get to know alumna Kayla Moses, PA-C

Months of training, years of planning and a lifelong love of the outdoors all converged for Kayla Moses, PA-C (MPAS ’17), on October 28, 2018—the day she and two friends reached the summit of Tanzania’s Mount Kilimanjaro.

Moses thrives on activities that allow her to explore the natural world. Besides her trip to Africa, the Madison native’s favorite expeditions include running in the Grand Canyon and backpacking in the Rockies and Cascades. For her, those adventures are even better when family and friends come along.

Curiosity, persistence and connectedness—personal characteristics that propelled Moses to the peak of Kilimanjaro—are also integral to her professional life.

Variety and Continuity of Care

Since September 2017, Moses has been a practicing physician assistant in family medicine at the Prairie Clinic in Sauk City, Wisconsin. Her patients span all ages and have a range of acute and chronic conditions. She appreciates the variety, and finds the continuity of care she can provide at a small, independent clinic to be one of the most gratifying parts of her practice.

“The more you can see someone, the more you get to know what their concerns are,” she reflects.

Role Models and Rewards

Moses first sensed that the Prairie Clinic was the right fit when she rotated there during her second year in the PA Program.

Not only did she love the patients and the community, the clinic’s advance-practice providers welcomed her as a peer and served as role models. “They had their own practices and patient panels,” she recalls. “You look at that when you’re a student and say, ‘That’s what I want.’”

Moses is grateful for her PA education, and is enjoying its rewards. But knowing she always has further to climb, she recalls the words of a former PA Program preceptor.

“He said, ‘There are no outliers in medicine. It takes 10,000 hours to achieve mastery, so just keep plugging along, because we all have to go through that hard, uncomfortable phase until we reach it.’”

Welcome Faculty Associate Amanda Johnson, MSM, PA-C

In February 2019, Amanda Johnson, MSM, PA-C, joined the PA Program as a new faculty associate. Johnson directs the professional seminar series in the clinical year and works closely with the director of clinical education to develop preceptorship sites, monitor sites and evaluate students during the clinical year. She also assists with instructing and coordinating the Hematology/Oncology course and the Clinical Skills labs. Before joining the PA Program, Johnson practiced for almost 15 years in rural medicine, family medicine, internal medicine, hematology/oncology and palliative care.
Scenes: WAPA Spring Conference

PA Program faculty, staff and students had a great experience at the Wisconsin Academy of Physician Assistants (WAPA) spring conference, held April 3-5, 2019, in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin.

Photos, clockwise from top right: students gear up for the WAPA Student Challenge bowl; student Javier Font presents his poster on the efficacy of the military acute concussion evaluation tool; PA Program Director Virginia Snyder, PhD, PA-C, presents her poster on the Cases of Patients series.

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2. Share an alumni reflection—details at go.wisc.edu/657684
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