DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

MEMBERS

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Sophie Trujillo, DO
Kenneth J. Vega, MD, FACG
Christopher D. Velez, MD
Nicole E. Villa, MD
Alexander W. Worix, MD
Bushra Zia, MD

Sonali Paul, MD, FACG

RESPONSIBILITIES AS STATED IN THE ACG BYLAWS

This Committee shall be responsible for heightening awareness of issues and strategies related to diversity, equity and inclusion by which the College can better serve the interests of all members and their patients. The Committee will work collaboratively with other committees in providing input through a healthy equity lens on programming such as educational, research and community engagement activities conducted by the College. This includes serving as an advisory group to the College on health disparity-related issues among racial, ethnic, gender, LGBTQ+ and other minority groups that the College can be a leader in addressing through programming for all members and patients. The Committee will also promote and advocate for inclusive representation in College leadership and work with other committees to increase participation, visibility, and advancement of members from underrepresented backgrounds in College-related activities such as appointments as faculty of ACG educational programs.

OBJECTIVES

1. To heighten awareness of issues and strategies related to diversity, equity and inclusion by which the College can best serve the interests of all members and their patients.
2. To work collaboratively with other committees in providing input through a healthy equity lens on programming such as educational, research and community engagement activities conducted by the College. This includes serving as an advisory group to the College on health disparity-related issues among racial, ethnic, gender, LGBTQ+ and other minority groups that the College can be a leader in addressing through programming for all members and patients.
3. To promote and advocate for inclusive representation in College leadership and work with other committees to increase participation, visibility, and advancement of members from underrepresented backgrounds in College-related activities such as appointments as faculty of ACG educational programs.
4. To help educate students from minority populations and underserved groups about careers in medicine and gastroenterology, through outreach, mentorship and research opportunities.

COMMITTEE REPORT

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee continues to work harmoniously to fulfill its mission to inform the College about health care issues among diverse population groups through a variety of programs:

ACG URIM Luncheon

This will be the third year of the DEI Luncheon discussing a variety of career paths, mitigating and overcoming unique obstacles faced by URIMs and honing the art and skill of networking. Speakers include Ayokunle Abegunde, MD, FACG (Loyola Medical Center); Victor Chedid, MD, MS (Mayo Clinic – Rochester); Jennifer Christie, MD (University of Colorado); Yasmin Hernandez-Barco, MD (Massachusetts General Hospital); and Ugonna Iroku, MD, MHS (Mount Sinai/Summit Health). The luncheon will be led by Patricia Ajayi-Fox, MD, and Sonali Paul, MD, FACG.

Summer Scholars Program

The Summer Scholars Program is a formalized mentorship and clinical research program designed to help increase representation of underrepresented groups in medicine in academic gastroenterology careers. The program is an 8 to 10-week structured clinical research experience for medical students in the U.S. from underrepresented racial/ethnic minority groups. Three students are chosen from the pool of applicants, paired with research mentors who share similar clinical research interests in the fields of gastroenterology and hepatology, and awarded a $5,000 stipend. At the end of the program, the students are required to submit a progress report and an abstract to a local, regional, or national conference.

The Summer Scholars Program subcommittee, led by Dr. Bushra Zia, selected the following recipients for the 2026 program:

- Moises Correa (Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine)
  Mentor: Danny Issa, MD – UCLA
- Jarret Wallerson (Howard University College of Medicine)
  Mentor: Jeremy Louissaint, MD – UT Southwestern

Prescriptions for Success Program

The ACG Prescriptions for Success subcommittee, led by Dr. Bushra Zia, awarded three students a $1,000 scholarship at Phoenix Bioscience High School: Chingwok Awejok, Kaden Hartley, and Naiya Pena. The ACG Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Healthcare Scholarship was awarded after the ACG 2025 Annual Meeting and consists of an award of $1,000 for up to three students who are interested in higher education and a career focused on healthcare. The Prescriptions for Success High School event will resume at the ACG 2027 Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas.

Leonidas Berry Health Equity Research Award (HERA)

The Committee partners with the ACG Institute's LE&E Center on the Leonidas Berry Health Equity Research Award (HERA). The 2026 recipient, Lauren Nephew, of Indiana University received a two-year award of $75,000 ($50k in year-one and $25k in year-two based on project progress) and will be researching "HOME-HCC: Home-Based Blood-Based Screening to Improve Hepatocellular Carcinoma Surveillance Equity." Applications for 2027 opened on August 31, 2026, and will close on December 7, 2026.

HERA Abstract of Distinction

This will be the second year of the ACG HERA Abstract of Distinction, which features quality improvement, clinical, translational, or basic science-oriented work in identifying and/or interventions centered on health equity or health care-based disparities in gastrointestinal diseases. Awardees will be recognized with a physical badge during the ACG 2026 Annual Meeting, as well as with a digital badge.