

# Michele Tracy Externship Experience at Hudson River HealthCare Community Clinics Summer 2012

Report submitted by:

**Heather Nennig**

University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health

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hnennig@wisc.edu

## **BACKGROUND:**

In the 1970s, healthcare in the Hudson River Valley was incredibly limited, especially for the uninsured and under-served. Concerned parents with sick children had to travel to Westchester Medical Center—a considerable distance—for medical care. Because of this lack of medical resources, four women—fondly known as the “founding mothers”—opened the Peekskill Area Ambulatory Health Center in July 1975 to treat the underserved of this impoverished city. Since then, the Hudson River HealthCare Community Clinics have expanded to 16 clinics across New York and serve over 40,000 patients annually.

## **EXPERIENCE SUMMARY:**

Over the course of seven weeks, I shadowed thirteen providers at eight Hudson River HealthCare Clinics in six fields of medicine. I summarize each of the experiences below:

### **Internal Medicine**

Carol Allen M.D., Dillard Elmore D.O., Lydia Biccocchi FNP  
at the Peekskill Clinic

During my time in Internal Medicine, I spent three days with Dr. Elmore, one afternoon with Lydia Biccocchi, and seven days with Dr. Allen. Dr. Elmore, a family physician who also does teledermatology, taught me the importance of encouraging patients to improve their healthy habits, and he also had an intuitive way of best connecting with his patients. With Ms. Biccocchi, a family nurse practitioner, I witnessed the struggles a provider can have with difficult patients. Ms. Biccocchi taught me the importance of handling these patients with extreme patience, understanding, and empathy.

Of all the physicians I shadowed this summer, I connected most with Dr. Allen. I admire her sharp critical thinking skills and her impressive history-taking abilities. She could determine the underlying issue of a medical problem in a few short minutes. Dr. Allen



Figure 1: Dr. Dillard Elmore (left)

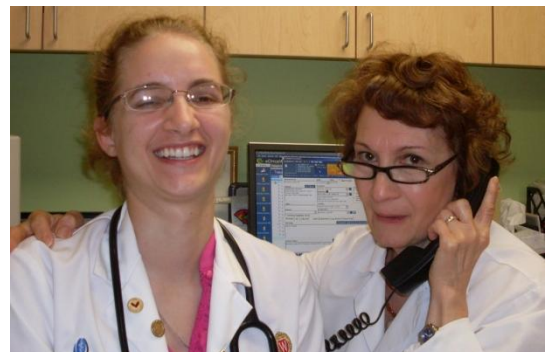


Figure 2: Lydia Biccocchi FNP (right)

also gives every patient a thorough physical examination, and because of her more than 30 years of experience at the VA, she quickly discerns any unusual findings. Most of all, I admire Dr. Allen’s attentiveness and complete focus on her patients. Instead of using exam room computers, she handwrites the patient’s complaints and relevant medical history so she can maintain eye contact and truly listen to the patient during the entire visit. At the end of each day, she asked me to research a condition or disease we either observed or discussed that day—a fantastic motivator! She patiently taught me common medications for conditions like hypertension, type II diabetes, chronic pain and psychiatric conditions. Every day with Dr. Allen was like an intellectual work-out; by 5 pm, my mind was pleasantly fatigued. I hope by the end of my medical training I can be as knowledgeable and dedicated as Dr. Allen.



Figure 3: Dr. Carol Allen (left)

## Family Medicine

Childebert St. Louis M.D.

at the Spring Valley and Haverstraw Clinics

Dr. St. Louis is a fantastic teacher and a very energetic and knowledgeable family physician. He was born in Haiti, raised in Canada, and now practices family medicine at two Hudson River HealthCare Clinics and a local hospital. His impressive lingual skills allow him to speak French, Creole, Spanish, and English fluently and effortlessly to his patients. Because of his surgical background, Dr. St. Louis enjoys performing simple procedures as well as routine visits. During my three whirlwind days with Dr. St. Louis, I witnessed a patient sent to the ER, the drainage of a very stubborn and painful abscess, the paring of hammer toe, two ear washings, and countless follow-up visits, referrals, diabetes check-ups and diagnoses, and GYN exams.

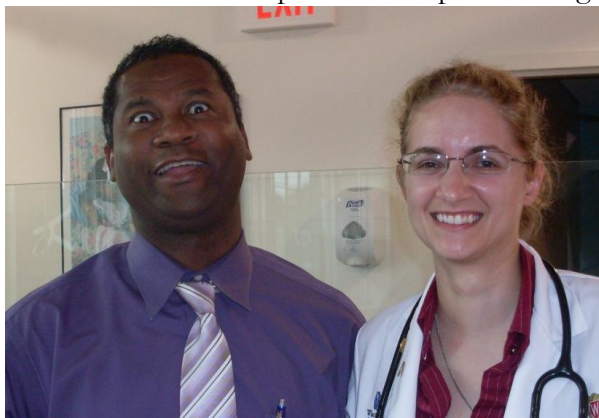


Figure 4: Dr. Childebert St. Louis (left)

The staff at both clinics treated me with kindness and generosity. My sole day at Spring Valley, a clinic that primarily serves Haitian patients, graciously invited me to their Hawaiian-themed lunch party, and I enjoyed the best Hawaiian food I’ve ever eaten. The staff at Haverstraw was equally accommodating and sweet. I felt incredibly welcome at Haverstraw, and they were a gleeful and festive group. I will miss them both very much.



Figure 5: Staff at the Haverstraw Clinic (with Dr. St. Louis in the middle)

## HIV and Hepatitis C

Christine Kerr M.D.

at the Peekskill, Beacon, and Monticello Clinics

Both HIV and hepatitis C are difficult chronic conditions to treat long-term. HIV and hepatitis C positive patients deal with significant social judgments and stigma, and the treatment regimens and medications for these conditions are continuously changing. Add in that most of the patients visiting Hudson River HealthCare have no insurance or ADAP only (federally-funded insurance for HIV meds) and are potentially jobless, homeless and without support systems. Dr. Christine Kerr, an infectious disease physician trained at Brown University and Harvard, treats these patients with immense empathy, compassion and dedication. With her incredible bed-side manner and impressive knowledge, Dr. Kerr could practice anywhere but she **chooses** to treat the poor and underserved of Peekskill, Beacon and Monticello, New York. She is also a wonderful teacher and patiently answered my seemingly endless questions about HIV treatments, CD4 count results, PCP (pneumocystis pneumonia) and hepatitis C genotypes. Because I believe that every person deserves the very best medical care, I hope I can become as well-trained and as dedicated to my patients as Dr. Kerr.



Figure 6: Dr. Christine Kerr (right)

## HIV, Hepatitis C, and Pain Management

Kelly Ramsey M.D.

at the Poughkeepsie Atrium and Amenia Clinics

If HIV and hepatitis C are difficult chronic conditions, try adding pain management to your repertoire. Dr. Kelly Ramsey, an internist, treats patients with chronic pain as well as HIV and hepatitis C. Unlike any physician I've shadowed before, Dr. Ramsey takes an impressively extensive history on all of her patients. She learns the nitty-gritty details because she truly wants to understand



Figure 7: Staff at the Poughkeepsie Atrium (with Dr. Ramsey being the third from the left)

her patients. Because of this, she could recall from memory a vast majority her patients' past medical history and social history. Dr. Ramsey is a strong believer in thorough documentation and charts every minute medical detail. Her patient visits seemed more like a conversation with a close friend than a patient-doctor encounter. I admire

the comfort level Dr. Ramsey had with her patients and how her patients truly open up to her.

## Women's Health

Joan Combellick CNM and Alice Gilgoff CNM  
at the Poughkeepsie Family Partnership, Beacon, and Peekskill Clinics



Figure 8: Joan Combellick CNM (right)

Before starting my week in women's health, my knowledge of female contraceptives, how to locate a fetal heartbeat or determine a fetal position was very limited. Joan Combellick at the Poughkeepsie Family Partnership and Beacon Clinics and the midwives at the Peekskill Women's Health Department educated me about the different contraception options and taught me these skills. Besides learning about women's health in general, I learned about the role of midwives in prenatal care and women's health. Ms. Combellick is a fantastic clinician whose calm disposition eases her patients the instant

she enters the exam room. She has an unspoken confidence that allows her patients to completely trust her with the health of themselves and their future children.

## Pediatrics

Vergenia Simpkins M.D., Mary Woo M.D., Angela Sanchez M.D., and Andrea Brescia M.D.  
at the Peekskill Clinic



Figure 9: From the left--Dr. Andrea Brescia, me, and Dr. Angela Sanchez

Being the youngest child on both sides of my family, my knowledge of pediatrics was embarrassingly small. Hence, my week with the Pediatric Department at the Peekskill Clinic was incredibly educational. I witnessed numerous wellness child visits of all ages, sick child visits and Strep throat cultures and learned about an alarmingly large number of vaccines. All the providers—Dr. Vergenia Simpkins, Dr. Mary Woo, Dr. Angela Sanchez, and Dr. Andrea Brescia—were very dedicated to their patients, and the love of children and their jobs was almost palpable. These pediatricians work at Hudson River HealthCare because they truly love helping

the underserved. The pediatrics staff is also incredibly dedicated to their patients and very caring and compassionate individuals.

Being fairly ignorant about pediatrics and childhood development, I was impressed at the number of developmental questions asked before each wellness child visit. This allowed the pediatricians to carefully monitor each child's development and send the child to early intervention if necessary. I

was also surprised at the prevalence of childhood obesity, especially in the Latino and African American populations. For the first time, I fully realized the severity of the childhood obesity epidemic and how it will continue to be a serious public health problem in the future.

## CONCLUSION

During my seven weeks at Hudson River HealthCare, I met thirteen amazing and dedicated providers and learned about countless interesting and often complicated medical cases. This externship challenged me—forcing me to leave my comfort zone geographically, linguistically, and scholastically. Because of this experience, I am determined to learn Spanish, become the best primary care physician possible and practice medicine at a federally-qualified health care center.

For those medical students interested in primary care and working with the under-served, I would highly recommend this externship.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the UW Department of Family Medicine for financial support and this wonderful opportunity. I would also like to thank Hudson River HealthCare and all the providers, nurses, and staff that helped me this summer. Finally, I send my **most** sincere thanks to the Velez-Phillips family for accepting me into their lovely family and truly making me feel at home 1000 miles away from home.



Figure 10: From the left--Dr. Vergenia Simpkins, Ken Sax FNP, me, and Dr. Mary Woo



Figure 11: From the left—me, Elisa Phillips, Benny Phillips, Dr. Madeline Velez-Phillips, and Jasmin Phillips