

MENTOR SPOTLIGHT: DR. MARY NORTON

By FCAAP Medical Student Committee Chair Scott Nelson



Scott Nelson, Author



Mary Norton, MD, FAAP

This month, I had the privilege of interviewing Mary Norton, MD, FAAP, Assistant Professor in the Department of Clinic Sciences at the Florida State University College of Medicine, about her role as a mentor to medical students and her perspectives on the field of pediatrics.

Scott Nelson: Please tell me about your current role as a faculty member at FSU and your involvement with the Pediatric Interest Group there.

Dr. Mary Norton: I have the privilege of serving as the faculty advisor for FSU College of Medicine’s Pediatric Interest Group. I am also the Assistant Director of the M2 Clinical Skills Course and am a frequent pediatric lecturer for second year physician assistant students. In regards to my clinical duties, I am the lead pediatrician at the newly established FSU PrimaryHealth Clinic at Sabal Palm Elementary School, and am actively involved with the Leon County Community Partnership School Cabinet.

SN: What was your “path to pediatrics?” Did you always know this was the specialty for you?

MN: The short answer is no. As a medical student at FSU COM, I was a Family Medical Scholar and involved with our global health student interest group (SIGH). I liked everything I was learning and wanted to know how to best serve families at home and abroad, but didn’t know how to narrow my interests beyond that. It wasn’t until I was more than half-way through my 3rd year of medical school that I lost my fear of interacting with “angry” or “worried” parents. Pediatricians inspire changes that have a multigenerational impact on the wellbeing children and their parents. Once I realized that power, I switched to pediatrics and never looked back!

SN: Are there any areas of advocacy that you are passionate about and/or participate in? Why is advocacy important to you?

MN: As pediatricians, our voices have a powerful impact on children, families, and our communities. I completely agree with the AAP Advocacy & Policy’s stance that “many of the major threats to children’s health today cannot be addressed adequately in the clinical setting alone.” My passion is community advocacy, because it gives me the opportunity



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to work with local advocates for children and families from multiple fields, like education and social services. We work together to address common goals like reducing exposure to toxic stress, building resiliency skills, and improving access to primary and behavioral health services.

SN: Do you think it is important to be a mentor for medical students?

MN: Absolutely! Building a relationship with a trusted mentor gives students the opportunity to learn from their mentor's experiences and gain insight they may not otherwise have about their journey into pediatrics. It also provides a safe space for constructive feedback, advice, and nurturing. I have benefited greatly from the wisdom and guidance I have received from my upper levels, faculty, and colleagues. Sometimes, a mentor you bond well with may not be easy to find at first, but don't give up! If you're having trouble finding one near you, check out the mentorship program offered by the AAP's Section on Pediatric Trainees.

SN: What challenges do you think pediatrics as a specialty faces going forward? What about the future of pediatrics is exciting to you?

MN: One of the biggest challenges I think we face is keeping up with the rapidly changing environment our patients currently live in. Much of what my patients are exposed to now (the prevalence of cyber bullying, Juuling, significant mental health burdens, increasingly toxic political environment, etc.) seem so much more intense than what I remember growing up with (and I'm a Millennial!). The same goes for parents, as parents now face more criticism and pressure to live an "Instagram perfect" life than previous generations did. It is critical for pediatricians to keep tabs on what our young people face so that we can appropriately support them. Working with children and families is a tremendous privilege and gives me such joy. I am proud to be able to face these challenges with them. This pediatrician-child-family partnership is what gives me hope for the future.

SN: What advice do you have for medical students who are interested in a career in pediatrics?

MN: Pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists as a group are warm, friendly, and encouraging. If you're interested in any aspect of pediatrics, don't be afraid to reach out to a pediatrician and ask how you can learn more. You never know what you may discover!

Questions about FCAAP's Medical Student Committee or interested in applying for a position on next year's committee? Contact Scott at spn16@med.fsu.edu.

About the author: Scott Nelson is a third-year medical student at the Florida State University College of Medicine and is the 2018-19 Chairperson of the FCAAP Medical Student Committee.

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