

Alumni Thoughts on the UNC MSTAR Program

“Before I came to the program, I had minor knowledge about geriatrics and how the older population is affected by medicine. With this program, I have gained a much greater insight into the field of geriatrics. I didn’t know what the definition of “geriatrics” was until the MSTAR program. I was able to see first-hand what geriatricians do and their viewpoints on the field. I have gained a better understanding of the various issues that are unique to the geriatric population. I also have learned that no matter what type of doctor I become, knowledge of the geriatric population will always be necessary.”

“I now have a completely different perspective. Prior to this experience, my main knowledge about the aging population came mostly from my own experiences with my grandparents, and the knowledge I gained from the EthnoGeriatrics course this past spring. I am now much more aware of the differences in the way people age, and the way different populations view various aspects of aging. I am more familiar with different problems and choices older people face (e.g. Medicare plans and DNR orders). Through my research, I’ve been extremely interested by the differences in the way people perceive urinary incontinence, and how those affect choices in seeking medical treatment.”

“The program has significantly altered my views on the aging population. From a personal perspective, my experiences conducting telephone interviews with elderly patients awakened me to the unique and highly variable values, concerns, and fears of older patients. From a public health perspective, my research has clearly and alarmingly made me aware of the significant need for research into the aging process and population. In other words, this experience has brought the aging population to the forefront of my mind.”

“I was surprised by the complexity of the patients’ medical problems, but invigorated by the diagnostic challenges and cerebral nature of the practice. I also appreciated seeing the team-approach in action, during rounds at the ACE unit. I was touched by many of the patient encounters, which were poignant reminders of the value of autonomy and the tough decisions families face regarding end of life care. Regardless of what path in medicine I choose, I am grateful I had this experience. Like all great experiences, it taught me a lot about myself and how I think I’d like to practice medicine in the future.”

“My project involved spending some time with elderly patients and their families. I’ve come to a better appreciation of how large this population really is, as well as the understandably large percentage of healthcare resources they consume. I’ve also learned that there are countless ways to improve the delivery of healthcare to this population, and that research into this population is often lacking in areas you wouldn’t expect. As I worked mostly on a mouth care translational research project, I came to see firsthand the lack of research into oral care for elderly patients, particularly those with cognitive or physical impairments.”

"I have gained a different perspective on the field of geriatrics, and now have a better understanding of why this field is so important. I have also gained more knowledge about conducting clinical research. I have now also seen what it is like to be a physician who practices medicine but is also heavily involved in research, and it has made me more confident of my decisions to be involved in research in the future when I become a physician."

"I feel like I will have an advantage over my classmates now. In the future, I will face many older patients, especially during the clinical years, and I now feel that I am more prepared to ask the right questions to better help those patients. Particularly with my research on urinary incontinence, I am very aware of how common the problem is, yet how few patients report the problem. I will never forget to ask patients if they have problems holding their urine, and I will be open to helping patients get the treatment they need. I also have more empathy toward this population. Although I can't personally relate through my own experience, I have a greater awareness of some of the issues older people face."

"I feel like my mentor will continue to be a mentor to me throughout my training, and will always be available to help me in any way they can."

"In my mentor, I have found someone I respect as a person, researcher, and physician. I have learned many research techniques, and my mentor taught me an immense amount about rheumatology when we were in clinic."

"My experience with my mentor is undoubtedly the most significant and beneficial experience of my medical school training to date. My mentor and I have fostered a professional and friendly relationship that will persist throughout medical school. Our project has instilled in me a significant appreciation and enthusiasm for academic medical research, which I hope to continue to foster throughout medical school."

"This project really opened my eyes to health disparities research and how to conduct it under the guise of a public health researcher. I was quite enlightened by health behavior theories, but it took some adjusting to. Words like "theoretical construct" and "normative belief" don't exist in the medical student world. I am really glad I had the opportunity to learn these concepts and I believe they will be useful in the future. Additionally, the analytical tools I've learned for reading and writing scientific literature should be useful."

"Having never had much experience in research before, I gained a lot of appreciation for the hard work that goes into even the smallest of studies. It was very helpful for me to just observe the lifestyle of a physician that spends significant time researching and practicing in the clinic. I was able to start feeling like I was applying what I knew and use my abilities to make others' lives better, and that was a powerful experience."

"I attended 3 days of clinical rotations. It was my favorite part of MSTAR. Faculty, interns and residents were very welcoming and willing to teach. Attending clinical rotations put my research experience into perspective and demonstrated why continued research is necessary. Clinical rotations helped me realize how much I've learned in a year."

"Knowing that my research was literature based, it was important for me to schedule clinical experiences because I wanted that to be a part of my summer experience. One of the strengths of the program is that it is flexible to each individual's needs."

"I had an amazing time with the MSTAR program at UNC Chapel Hill. I feel that everyone was so accommodating and helpful, and I personally felt that the program ran very smoothly. I felt that I received enough clinical and research experience, which is exactly what I wanted from the program. If I could, I would do this program again next summer. While I was here, they have always been helpful and I have never had a problem getting in touch with them. For clinical rotations, I also had an amazing time."

"I have really enjoyed being part of this program and am very glad that I chose to participate in MSTAR this summer. I found my research exciting and the clinical rotations immensely useful. My mentor was wonderful, and the staff/faculty coordinating MSTAR clearly care about students and are some of the most wonderful people I have met at UNC!"

"I really enjoyed my experience with the MSTAR program at UNC-Chapel Hill, and I feel like it has helped increase my awareness about medicine and the different potential paths for the future."