



Authority Health residents assume leadership role in promote COVID vaccine acceptance

In June, Dr. Nicolas Fletcher was helping his parents move into a new home in Philadelphia when he got a call from a friend in Detroit. She told Nicolas he had an opportunity to be involved in a public service campaign that was in production to promote the COVID vaccine.

Newly accepted into the Authority Health graduate medical education teaching health center, and new to Wayne County, Fletcher thought it was a good idea and a great way to get involved in the county-wide vaccination effort personally. So, he caught the first available flight to Detroit. After a two-hour media session, which included photographs for a social media post and a video public service ad, he was back on a plane to Philadelphia, only to return to Detroit for his training a few weeks later.

Drs. Jeremy and Jermaine Hogstrom, who appeared on a panel of young Black physicians last year to discuss the pandemic, had also been asked to participate in the public service project. They have become very active, and successful, in building a social media brand for leveraging their role as Black physicians – and twins – to appeal to social media consumers on health topics.

Jeremy and Jermaine Hogstrom and Nicolas Fletcher are examples of young Black physicians who believe in the greater good of their support network. They realize that they have an opportunity – arguably a responsibility – to define their role as influencers for health, as well as personal and professional development among young people.

The medical residents were selected to appear in the Wayne County “Wayne Vax” campaign. Dubbed “Trusted Voices,” the residents appeared on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and online video placed on YouTube and streaming television.

The Hogstroms appeared together on a bus billboard, with Jermaine’s sleeve rolled up, revealing a band aid over his vaccination site. The headline reads, “Sleeves up is the look this summer.” Fletcher appeared in the Facebook post, “Protect Yourself/Protect Your Community.” In each case, the ads direct the reader to “Text: Wayne Vax to 48355.”

The Hogstroms also participated in a COVID vaccine public service announcement developed by the State of Michigan, which is situated in a barbershop setting with Lt. Gov.

Garlin Gilcrest. “We had a discussion about getting back to normalcy and the importance of the COVID vaccine, especially with the millennials and Gen Zs – the youth, really,” Jermaine explains. “It was a barbershop set. They had an actual barber. We were having a conversation while the lieutenant governor was actually getting his hair cut, trying to make it look as authentic as possible.”

There’s a critical need to convey the positive message of vaccine use – and overall health promotion – to mediums that are used by minority and younger populations, and most important, “it’s just the need for the public to be able to relate to (the message),” notes Jermaine Hogstrom. “People out there feel comfortable following on social media... I feel it benefits the community as a whole.” As African American physicians, the residents gain relatability among Black audiences, he says. “People who represent them; people they can relate to...especially for people to see physicians of color and see us talking about the vaccine and why we feel that they would benefit from the vaccine. We can open the door...and they can be more accepting.”

The young physicians are entering their profession when trust in the medical and scientific professions is low, especially noted through resistance to the COVID vaccine. They realize that they need to do more than provide individual care for people in a health center.

“It starts with community outreach,” says Jeremy Hogstrom. “This year, especially, we’ve begun to think about how we can impact the community as we go into practice. Being able to make ourselves a visual face in the community helps to establish in that way.”

Jermaine adds that being visible in the community is essential. “It’s hard to treat a community without being in it. When people grow up in disadvantaged communities, they don’t always have the best support for achieving big goals.” The Hogstroms believe that the virtual community is as important as the actual, in-person community. They have produced several Tik Tok videos, some “silly” and humorous, covering health topics. One that received thousands of likes, was a take on the pop hit, “Wipe It Down” by BMW Kenny.

Much of the material they place on social media is “funny but relatable,” Jermaine says. “Growing up in the ‘hood, you don’t always have the best support for starting big goals.” It’s not so much establishing an authoritative figure as a physician, but to be seen as African American and “relatable,” he says. “That’s exactly what I want to be seen as – to be relatable and I think trust starts with that. The second thing, of course, is sharing factual information and to be sure the information is correct. The issue we still have is that distrust runs heavy and deep. Trying to open the conversation is hard, even if it’s in the clinic. You try to find a balance – not pushing too hard. It definitely starts with being in the community and being visible. Make yourself visible and people will be more willing to listen, whether they agree or not.”

In part, Dr. Fletcher entered the field of psychiatry because he wanted to understand the back story of why people present with mental and medical problems. To that end, he wants to know why people adopt beliefs about vaccine use and other forms of health behavior. So when he accepted the call to come to Detroit to participate in the public service project, it was a continuation of work he had already begun as a medical student.

“Personally, for me, that fit with what I had been doing at that point. I was coming out of medical school and graduate school. I wrote a piece on COVID mitigation and what it would take for the lifting mitigation restrictions. So, the PSA fit in with what I wanted to do, and I saw it as an opportunity to connect with the community I planned to serve.”

Fletcher didn’t think anything about the suddenness or complexity of his sudden public service project in Detroit. “When the opportunity presented itself, I figured, I could fly back and do this for a couple of hours, see some friends, so that’s what I did. It was a great opportunity to get to know the city. Starting a residency at Authority Health was my first time working in Detroit. So, I thought it would be a good way to hit the ground running.”

When young Black physicians in Detroit learned that Fletcher was joining the Authority Health residency, he was immediately invited to join Jeremy, Jermaine, and other Black physicians committed to community engagement. “We’re all part of this little network of medical residents in the Wayne County area, across the different health systems. We keep in touch. We keep in contact with one another through various means – What’s App, social media – so that we’re all in the know as to what’s going on in the city, and opportunities that may present themselves.”

The Authority Health residents are also concerned with promoting professional development among young African American men, particularly in the field of medicine. “The image that society creates for black men,” notes Jermaine Hogstrom. “Is that you have to aspire to be rapper, a football player, a good basketball player. There’s nothing wrong with those things. People are successful doing them. People go to college and still go into those professions, but society tends not to diversify what the possibilities of success looks like for black men. For example, in mainstream media or the news we don’t see this displayed often.”

Jeremy Hogstrom adds, “We can do a better job at diversifying what success can look like. Sure, you can be a basketball player, a football player, a music artist, but you can also be a



doctor, a nurse, an engineer, a construction worker, whatever you want to do and be inspired to be. That's the message that is lost."

They are also involved with the Men of Courage program, sponsored by Ford Motor Company. "Men of Courage is all about changing the narrative surrounding African American males and providing an environment that cultivates success and shows examples of how African American males can be successful in all walks of life. I feel that values start young," Jeremy says. "And it starts with the parents. It's important that youth are encouraged to be open-minded to all possibilities and professions and that they are able to see success by people that look like they do. At an early age our parents instilled in us that there was nothing that we couldn't do and they opened our minds to all of the possibilities that we could achieve. Being involved in the Men of courage program helps us and others to do the same for African American youth in the city of Detroit.

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The Authority Health Graduate Medical Education Teaching Health Center trains 71 residents in four primary care residencies: Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, and Psychiatry. The residents receive most of their training in community health centers or community mental health facilities, in addition to their required hospital training. In addition, they receive a population health certification through the University of Michigan School of Public Health, training in trauma informed care, and a three-year orientation to racial equity and social justice. About 80 percent of Authority Health residents establish their physician practices in medical shortage areas, 57 percent of them in Michigan.