

## Recipients of Dr. Chirag Shah International Resident Award

2023

Postgraduate Medical Education is pleased to announce the winners of the Dr. Chirag Shah International Resident award. The \$2,000 award was established in 2012 by Dr. Shah to assist international medical graduates who are adjusting to life in Canada and to inspire them to give back to their community and contribute to making Canada a better place.



**Dr. Sunil Samnani**  
PGY2 Internal Medicine

*I was born and raised in a middle-class family in Pakistan. My upbringing was always centred around giving back to the community. I was involved with community service through our local scout organization from a young age. I learnt new skills and worked in a team to serve the community. This experience set the foundation for my professional journey in medicine.*

*After completing my medical school in Pakistan and being in an underserved community with a low literacy rate and limited resources, I understood the needs of underserved populations. I realized that the rates of non-communicable diseases are exponentially rising. To better serve the community, I joined the Aga Khan Development Network to promote awareness about non-communicable diseases. We conducted awareness sessions for the community and advocated for healthy lifestyles. This helped me enhance my understanding of health promotion, disease prevention, and engaging communities. During my residency in Pakistan, with my experience in General Surgery and Trauma care, I was part of a disaster management team helping with emergency responses to natural disasters in remote areas.*

*When I moved to Canada in 2016, I faced several challenges adapting to this new environment. I realized that I was not alone and that immigrants face multiple settlement issues, including access to healthcare and navigating the healthcare system. This provided me with the idea to research this topic. We identified the problems and suggested possible options. To address and inform the community about our possible suggestions, we conducted knowledge translation sessions in Urdu and English to address potential outcomes to overcome barriers to primary health care.*

*The pandemic was the phase where the community needed us the most. Many seniors in my community feared getting COVID-19 infection, thus limiting themselves within their social bubble. With the help of my colleagues, we set up volunteer service to assist seniors with their groceries to limit their chances of getting infected. We also visited them to set them up with social media so they could relate to their family and friends. This has provided me with satisfaction and motivation to continue community services.*

*Fortunately, I was accepted into the Internal Medicine Residency Program last year. As a result, I have been exposed to academic mentors that have inspired me to conduct research projects. One area of interest to me was the impact of the pandemic on oncology patients. We conducted a survey to assess patients' perspectives on the impact of the COVID pandemic on their treatment and psycho-social health. The results have provided us with the platform to improve our psycho-oncological care, particularly during COVID. Another project I started last year is to identify the barriers and enablers to advance care planning discussions from the perspective of family physicians and the South-Asian population. These results will help us tailor awareness sessions for our community members, particularly from the South-Asian community, to highlight the importance of advanced care planning. I am excited to see the benefit of this initiative in the future.*

*My goal is to continue to serve the community and to improve the lives of those around me, especially those who, like myself, are newcomers to Canada. I am eager to combine my passion for service with my medical knowledge and training to help me achieve this goal. My future goal is to get a master's degree in Public Health after completion of my residency training, which will allow me to serve the community at large on a population level. The Chirag Shah award will provide support as I work towards these goals.*

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**Dr. Joanna Mycek**  
PGY2 Internal Medicine

*I was born and raised in a small town in Poland. Since my childhood, I was seeing my future as being an astronaut! That was really my early dream and adulthood imagination; I was reading books about planets all day long, dreaming about having a full understanding of the Universe one day. I wanted to do something special, something that most people can only dream of, doing research about astronomy and maybe travel to the space one day. Then growing up, I realized that I like being around people, serving them and seeing their smiles, which I guess would be a “bit” difficult as an astronaut. Choosing a medical school turned out to be an excellent fit for me, to connect interesting (sometimes surreal) aspects of complex pathophysiology with a human ingredient, seeing grateful patients, it became very rewarding and amazing journey.*

*Since the beginning of my medical career, I somehow developed a great interest in oncology field, amazing combination of cancer science with psychooncology and palliative medicine as inseparable elements of cancer treatment. While learning about different cancers, at the same time I was trying to observe and understand what people feel when they get cancer diagnosis, how we can mentally support them and their families. While in my medical school, I had been volunteering in a Hospice in Poland, talking to people, spending time with them, and sometimes just holding their hands. Seems like nothing special, but for some patients it meant a world. I have learned a lot of patience, peace and harmony while being there.*

*Aside from my passion to oncology, I have been also a dedicated teacher for many years now. During my medical school, I was volunteering as anatomy teacher helping students who were not able to afford special books and additional courses. I also started providing first aid courses in organizations helping people with disabilities. After moving in Canada in 2013, I established a company offering first aid courses. When needed, I have been providing free baby first aid sessions for dayhomes and parents, especially for immigrant-home-stay-moms who never learned first aid before. The funding would really*



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*help me to offer more free courses for people who are not able to afford them, but are willing to learn first aid to keep their babies and children safe.*

*I hope after completing my Internal Medicine training, I will be able to continue my career in oncology and connecting medical aspect of treatment with simply having a big heart for my patients. Previously, my understanding of doing something special was travelling to the space. Now I understand, that being a physician, helping others and offering our time and support is special enough. I believe all physicians are exceptional and I want to specifically congratulate international physicians who, despite a difficult process of becoming a licensed doctor in Canada, never resigned from their unique profession.*