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News Release

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Local Medical Student Receives Allegheny County Medical Society (ACMS) Scholarship

HARRISBURG, Pa. — The Allegheny County Medical Society (ACMS) scholarship of \$4,000 was awarded to Akshaya Arjunan by The Foundation of the Pennsylvania Medical Society. Akshaya resides in Pittsburgh and is a third-year medical student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. She is the daughter of Palaniappa and Santhi Arjunan of Allison Park, Pa.

Akshaya, a resident of Allegheny County, recalls one of her earliest memories which helped influence her interest to practice in medicine. It was while she was shadowing mentor Dr. Menon, at the Gudalur Adivasi Hospital in southern India, a hospital serving over 25,000 aboriginals of scheduled tribes. She explained that despite below standard resources and care settings, Dr. Menon still provided quality care that was unwavering.

“I watched as Dr. Menon worked with minimal lighting and sterilization to help a young male who was bleeding immensely following a motor vehicle accident.” Akshaya went on to add how his regular demeanor and compassion strengthened his relationships with patients. “I observed how Dr. Menon spent the first five minutes of every patient visit asking about their family, work, or other aspect of their life, before moving onto health-related topics. I listened as patients would confide in him, demonstrating the immense trust they had in him. My experiences in Gudalur taught me that possessing a body of medical knowledge and a unique set of skills are but the bare minimum of what it means to be a physician. Compassion, inquisitiveness, and being able to treat a patient holistically, rather than just symptomatically, are all important traits to be an effective physician.”

While serving the Gudalur community, Akshaya was introduced to hematology and the lack of health literacy. It was here where she found direction for her career concentration. “Speaking with patients informed me that there are numerous factors that could influence an individual's health, such as income, education, familial support and others. However, the lack of health literacy was a significant contributor, specifically regarding the sickle cell population. At the time there were no newborn screening programs, no genetic counseling, and limited health

education addressing what having sickle cell trait means for future children. Moreover, patients with sickle cell disease (SCD) knew very little about their own illness. While they did learn how to manage their health through trial and error, they didn't truly understand the importance of health hygiene and how it helps prevent early mortality.”

Akshaya’s sister Aishwarya, a genetic counselor in Chicago, also played a vital role in her passion of hematology. “She was very influential in helping me understand how important newborn screening and genetic counseling is for parents. While in Gudalur a portion of her assignment was to create a pamphlet about sickle cell disease that would be translated into native languages to help the community better understand inheritance patterns, signs and symptoms, and treatment options.”

Through her experiences in India and the volunteer work she had with the Children’s Sickle Cell Foundation in Pittsburgh, Akshaya is committed to a career in pediatric hematology. “I envision my future work to incorporate preventative medicine and public health with my duties as a hospitalist. Specifically, my career goals in SCD are three-fold: revamping local infrastructure, providing streamlined care in the hospital and global outreach,” she said. “From talking to patients in Pittsburgh, it is apparent how much the lack of outside resources, such as sickle cell education or mental health outreach, significantly impacts health outcomes. Moreover, the lack of proper transition models in hospitals to help pediatric patients move into adult care are major contributing factors towards poor follow up in adulthood. Young adults are at the highest risk for organ-related damage due to sickle cell disease, so ensuring transitional programs that are comfortable and safe, are of utmost importance.”

Akshaya is a member of the class of 2019, and in addition to her experiences and volunteer work, she is grateful for her education and research opportunities. “My experiences so far in college and medical school have not only guided my passion for SCD and global health but also given me a unique skill set that I can continue building on throughout the rest of my career. Moreover, I hope that my initiatives will inspire other physicians to devote more time to preventative medicine.”

In 2004, ACMS Foundation established the annual scholarship with \$10,000 in seed money, which has grown to maturity because of generous contributions from the ACMS Foundation and local physicians. To be an eligible recipient of this scholarship, students must be a full-time enrolled third or fourth-year Pennsylvania medical student from Allegheny County, as well as a U.S. citizen.

The Foundation of the Pennsylvania Medical Society is pleased to administer the fund for ACMS Foundation. ACMS’s mission is to provide leadership and advocacy for patients and physicians.

The Foundation, a nonprofit affiliate of the Pennsylvania Medical Society, sustains the future of medicine in Pennsylvania by providing programs that support medical education, physician health and excellence in practice. It has helped finance medical education for more than 63 years.

For more information about this scholarship, or other scholarship opportunities, please visit [www.foundationpamedsoc.org](http://www.foundationpamedsoc.org). For questions, contact the Foundation's Student Financial Services Director, Deborah Monko at (717) 558-7854.



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