



Supporting Student Excellence

For Eddie Bellfield, Medicine and Public Health Go Hand in Hand

For third-year Boston University medical student Edward “Eddie” Bellfield, the 11-month M.P.H program at UC Berkeley’s School of Public Health provided a great opportunity—to get warm. A native of Ventura County, Bellfield greatly missed the sunny California weather during his time spent in chilly Boston. “California’s a great place, great weather,” he says. “I didn’t think the New England climate would affect me as much as it did. There is a reason why seasonal affective disorder has the acronym SAD!”

A member of the School’s first group of Kaiser Permanente Public Health Scholars, Bellfield is taking a “time out” from medical school to fit 42 units of public health coursework into one year of intensive study. He doesn’t mind the workload though: “Pretty much anything they throw at me, I think, ‘All right, it’s still not as bad as med school!’” he jokes. “Anyway, given the fact that I’m learning all kinds of really neat stuff in the midst of health care reform, it’s very much worth it.”

As a UC Berkeley undergraduate majoring in chemical biology, Bellfield cofounded the University’s first pre-medical fraternity, Sigma Mu Delta, volunteered at the Berkeley Free Clinic, and served as commissioner on Berkeley’s Community Health Commission. Those experiences introduced him to the value of public health, and he planned to get an M.P.H at some point during his medical training.

“For me, the public health education is going to be a strength,” he explains. “It really broadens your knowledge of what

resources are out there and what remedies are available. It will allow me to not just be someone who complains but someone who can do something about it.”

Once he completes his M.P.H, Bellfield will have one final year at Boston University School of Medicine. He then plans to come back to California once again to complete his residency in pediatrics. From where he stands, so close to the finish line, it all seems imminently achievable, but Bellfield doesn’t take his path to goals for granted.

“Even getting to undergrad in the first place, I was already an outlier there,” he says. “Back where I’m from, Oxnard, it’s a mostly Hispanic city. My parents, both are Hispanic—my dad is half Mexican and my mom is from

Mexico. I was the first person in my family to go off to a four-year university. My parents have always encouraged me and my siblings to push ourselves. But from what I’ve seen that’s very difficult to do when everyone around you doesn’t have that same mindset. It’s extremely difficult to break out of that mold.”

Although Bellfield didn’t have a lot of academic role models growing up, he was gifted with a strong sense of culture and community. His family attended a Latino church, and it was important to his parents that he and his siblings were immersed in Latino culture. He says, “Definitely, I think that’s one of the things that my parents really had going for me was the idea that, despite all that happens and despite where you end up, you’re still one of us. Your name may be Edward John Bellfield, but don’t let the name fool you!”

Bellfield recalls being surprised and inspired by the outpouring of support he received the first time he returned to his hometown church. “I was probably the first from that community to go off to college. The first time I went back home, I went to that church, and I couldn’t believe how everyone was really proud of me. Like one of their own is finally making it. That felt really good. I’m not only representing my family, I’m representing the whole community there.”

In addition to family and community, Bellfield believes that entities and individuals who provide scholarships for students are also a great source of support and inspiration. “In addition to the financial support, which allows me to focus on my education, it is good

motivation that you have this organization that’s backing you, that believes that you can succeed. You don’t want to let them down.”

Bellfield now has a lot of experience and many tools for success in service to the Latino community, in primary care and pediatrics. He has done work in Latino cultural competency among the physician workforce, and is currently working with the Compass Care program at UCSF Children’s Hospital, which provides palliative care for children with chronic life-threatening conditions.

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Last year, Bellfield’s synthesis of medicine and public health came together in a very positive way when, while working at the Boston Medical Center, he was able to help a

Latina patient learn that she still had a job. The woman had come in to the clinic with back problems, but had just that day received a letter from the factory where she worked, and was worried she was being fired. Bellfield was able to translate the letter for her, and reassure her that it was only a warning and she was still employed. “It was a huge relief; I think that did more for her than anything we prescribed for her that day. That was a great moment for me because I was able to actually help this woman with something that was really affecting her well being. From that, and from many other experiences, I’ve learned that medicine is much more than just treating and diagnosing.”

Help Train Tomorrow’s Leaders

Scholarships and fellowships provide more than just financial support. For students like Eddie, the message of “We believe in you” provides powerful inspiration along the path to success.

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