

SHOOTING

STARS: *How the Endocrine Society's FLARE Program Has Changed the Face of Endocrinology*

The Endocrine Society's Future Leaders Advancing Research in Endocrinology program — better known as FLARE — has not only enriched the Society by increasing underrepresented minority participation, but it has enriched the field of endocrinology in the U.S.

BY GLENDA FAUNTLEROY SHAW



FLARE. It's an acronym that forms the word meaning "a blaze of light used to attract attention" and "a spreading outward." These definitions may be the best way to describe the goal of the Future Leaders Advancing Research in Endocrinology — one of the Endocrine Society's three major diversity programs that have aimed to increase representation of minorities in the specialty. FLARE follows the path of two past programs, the "Endocrine Short Courses" and Minority Access Program, started in 1998 and 2006, respectively.

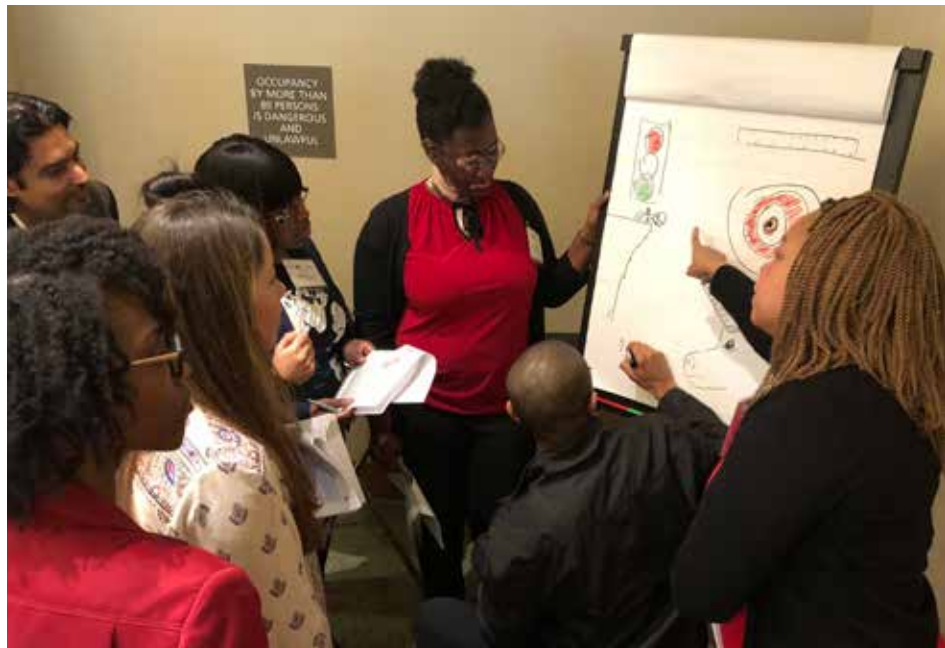


FLARE class of 2017 includes: Alexandra Acevedo-Rodriguez, Diana Alba, Anika Anam, Maigen Bethea, Justin Echouffo Tcheugui, Betiel Fesseha, Inga Harbuz-Miller, Angelina Hernandez, Allison LaRoche, Jean Marie Mwiza, Victoria Parker, Melissa Rodriguez, Keisha Smith, Chinenye Usuh, Desiree Williford, and Aurelia Wood.

While those earlier programs conducted outreach to minority undergraduate students, FLARE's goal has been to support minorities further along in their academic or scientific research careers who have demonstrated achievement in endocrine research.

Endocrine Society president, E. Dale Abel, MD, PhD, has served as the director of FLARE since the start. "For many years, I was also involved in the Minority Affairs Committee and we recognized there was a need for professional development training for underrepresented minorities in that transition between the end of either their PhD or graduate school training, their post-doc or fellowship or during the early stages of their faculty career," recalls Abel, chair of the Department of Internal Medicine and Director of the Fraternal Order of Eagles Diabetes Research Center at the University of Iowa.

In 2013, Abel helped the Endocrine Society win a grant award from the National Institutes of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases that funded FLARE for an initial five years.



Puneet Arora, MD, Camille McLean, MD, Irene Aninye, PhD, Cherie Butts, PhD, Andrew LaPelusa, Sade Williams, and Diana Elizondo during a team-building activity at a FLARE workshop.



“**FLARE taught me to utilize my strengths, become comfortable outside of my comfort zone, and be confident in what I set out to do.** More than making me a better and more efficient scientist, it also provided a community of individuals from all different stages and career backgrounds that continue to support my growth and success.”

— SHANNA NEWTON, PHD CANDIDATE, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO; 2018 FLARE FELLOW

And for Abel, the challenge was clear. “We wanted to determine if increasing minority participation in the Endocrine Society as a result of participation in the program would not only increase the likelihood of both their long-term retention in science and their long-term success, but also increase diversity in the governance and leadership of this professional society,” he says.

FLARE’s basic criteria is that applicants are currently enrolled in a U.S. graduate program, post-doctoral fellowship, endocrine clinical fellowship, or junior faculty (within one to three years of obtaining faculty position). They must also be of an ethnic minority group underrepresented in the biomedical sciences. The majority (93%) of accepted fellows are African American and Hispanic American/Latino.

FLARE was awarded a second five-year grant in 2018 that allowed for a class that year of 24 fellows. During the first award, the program trained 104 FLARE fellows.

The program’s chief component is an annual two-day workshop where fellows hone career development skills such as developing a professional development plan, effective mentorship, finding research funding, managing a lab or research team, self-awareness training, dealing with interpersonal conflict, and marketing oneself to potential employers. During the workshop, Endocrine Society members who serve as FLARE faculty share their professional wisdom and guidance and begin long-lasting mentor relationships with participants.

After the workshop, fellows choose to continue their career development through one of two paths — internship or mentorship.

Paying It Forward

Leonor Corsino, MD, associate professor of medicine in the Division of Endocrinology, Metabolism, and Nutrition at Duke University School of Medicine, Durham, N.C., is part of the FLARE faculty and says she joined the program because she strongly believes in investing in the next generation of providers in the field. “I am passionate about mentoring and serving as guidance for those coming behind me,” she says. “I have been fortunate to have had the amazing opportunity to work with an array of mentors who provided me with the much-needed guidance to get where I am today.”

Puneet Arora, MD, vice president, clinical development at Principia Biopharma, South San Francisco, Calif., echoes the sentiment. The February 2020 FLARE workshop taking place in Austin, Texas, will mark his seventh term as faculty. “FLARE is a great opportunity for both fellows and faculty to broaden horizons and explore new ideas,” Arora says. “I was working with the Minority Affairs Committee when I first got involved and saw it as an opportunity to start a discussion on non-academic science career options. I have endeavored to use my own career path as an example for fellows early in their careers, to encourage thinking outside the box and to examine diverse options and be willing to take chances and embrace change.

“It’s a unique workshop that brings together peers and mentors in an open atmosphere, while providing exposure to successful role models,” he continues. “I have often told fellows that I wish there had been such opportunities when I was a fellow.”



The class of 2013, the first FLARE Class: Irene Aninye, Diana Cittelly, Geraldine Ekpo, Latrice Faulkner, Christina Garlington, Mariana Haedo, Courtney Law, Mario Oyola, Michelle Rivera-Vega, Isabel Rubio Schlaepfer, Tanya Russell, Carmen Soto-Rivera, Rhonda Souvenir, and Lindsey Trevino.

One of FLARE's many success stories is Bryan Wilson, PhD, MBA, a regional medical scientific director for cardiovascular sciences at Merck Research Laboratories in New Orleans, La.

"I was inspired to apply to FLARE because I noticed firsthand how dedicated the program is toward developing the science pipeline," Wilson recalls. "All of the mentors in FLARE are incredibly excellent in their fields of study. Additionally, they are equally excellent in paying it forward to assist science trainees becoming successful."

Shanna Newton, a PhD candidate at the University of California, San Diego, is a 2018 FLARE fellow whose research is focused in reproductive neuroendocrinology. She learned about FLARE from a fellow graduate student and FLARE

alumni. "The FLARE program has impacted my professional growth more than I would have ever expected," Newton says. "Prior to my involvement, I was extremely reserved and overly critical, overwhelmed with what I didn't know, and too afraid to speak up when I had something meaningful to contribute. The workshop was key in shifting my mindset and thus my productivity."

"FLARE taught me to utilize my strengths, become comfortable outside of my comfort zone, and be confident in what I set out to do," she adds. "More than making me a better and more efficient scientist, it also provided a community of individuals from all different stages and career backgrounds that continue to support my growth and success."



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“Creating a Robust Pipeline”

FLARE has helped place past participants in positions at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), nonprofit, and academic institutions, Abel says. “They’re being tapped for leadership roles as well,” he says. “So, it has been incredibly effective and we were able to demonstrate that in the grant renewal. It obviously convinced the reviewers that the initial investment was well spent and the likelihood for ongoing success was high.”

The impact has especially been felt at the Endocrine Society in the representation in Society governance and leadership. In 2002, about 8% of underrepresented minorities served on a Society committee. By 2018, that number had more than doubled to about 17%.

“This shows we clearly have a significant impact on creating a robust pipeline of future leaders,” Abel points out. “We also realize, though, that there’s a long way to go.”

Past FLARE fellows have participated on several committees, including the Governance Task Force, Trainee/Early Career Committee, Leadership Development Task Force, and Research Affairs, to name a few. FLARE fellows are also serving as near-peer mentors to students and speaking regularly at Society events and activities.

“I’m very proud of the tremendous loyalty the program has imbued in the individuals who have participated and then, in kind, paid it forward,” Abel says. “I think what we are seeing is a multiplying effect that we’re going to have individuals who not only have been direct beneficiaries but, ultimately, will become mentors and servants in order to ensure the pipeline remains robust.”

Newton is one who sets the example.

“I have since become a member of the Endocrine Society’s Trainee and Career Development Core Committee and have helped lead this year’s Summer Research Fellows so that I



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— LEONOR CORSINO, MD, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE IN THE DIVISION OF ENDOCRINOLOGY, METABOLISM, AND NUTRITION, DUKE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, DURHAM, N.C.




“ Getting involved in FLARE taught me that it’s never too late to share your gifts and talent with the world. When you’re a trainee in development, we sometimes feel as if our talents aren’t good enough. However, people are actually anticipating authenticity and eagerly want to learn from our experiences and perspectives.”

— BRYAN WILSON, PHD, MBA, REGIONAL MEDICAL SCIENTIFIC DIRECTOR FOR CARDIOVASCULAR SCIENCES, MERCK RESEARCH LABORATORIES, NEW ORLEANS, LA.

can inspire and empower the next generation of endocrine researchers and clinicians,” she says.

Wilson’s advice for minority scientists considering applying for FLARE is to “just do it!”

“Getting involved in FLARE taught me that it’s never too late to share your gifts and talent with the world,” he adds. “When you’re a trainee in development, we sometimes feel as if our talents aren’t good enough. However, people are actually anticipating authenticity and eagerly want to learn from our experiences and perspectives.” 

FLARE 2020
Watch for news of the
FLARE Class of 2020.
For more information, email
diversity@endocrine.org.



One of the lectures taking place during the first FLARE workshop in 2013.

— FAUNTLEROY SHAW IS A FREELANCE WRITER BASED IN CARMEL, IND. SHE IS A REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR TO ENDOCRINE NEWS.