Humans of CDI

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J. Sawalla Guseh, M.D., is the Director of the Cardiovascular Performance Program at Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, and an Assistant Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School. He is a former Chief Resident in Medicine at Mass General and focuses clinically on the cardiovascular care of athletes and highly active individuals. Dr. Guseh has earned several accolades, including the 2018 AHA Laennec Young Clinician Award and was a Roman DeSanctis Clinical Scholar. He is the team cardiologist for the New England Patriots and Revolution and sits on the American College of Cardiology's Sports and Exercise Council. His research, supported by several awards and fellowships, explores the nexus of human aerobic fitness and cardiovascular health.

To learn more about Dr. J. Sawalla Guseh's pioneering research on the biological effects of exercise on cardiovascular health and his journey from resident to team cardiologist for the New England Patriots, keep reading.

As our upcoming Chester Pierce speaker, reflecting on your journey, how have the support and resources provided by the CDI influenced your career trajectory and research pursuits? Was there a pivotal moment or experience in your career that fueled your passion for your current research focus?

The support from CDI and the PSDA was pivotal early in my career, granting me the flexibility to delve into my current research areas— the biological effects of exercise and the biological basis of fitness. Transitioning from a clinical cardiology fellowship, I was inspired by exercise's profound impact on cardiovascular outcomes. This curiosity deepened during my time studying exercise models under Professor Tony Rosenzweig and was further nurtured by my clinical focus with Professor Aaron Baggish, who specializes in athlete care and research while helping to found MGH's first of kind sports cardiology program."

Having experienced the support and resources provided by the CDI, how do you believe it contributes to breaking down barriers and fostering a more inclusive environment in academic medicine and research? Why are centers like CDI essential in the field of medicine and research, especially in fostering diversity and inclusion?

CDI's role in making research mentorship more accessible to residents from underserved groups is invaluable for advancing diversity in academic medicine. I believe that looking at the full spectrum of human variation holds keys to better health outcomes, which we can only unlock through inclusive research practices. Historically, diseases impacting minority populations received less attention—a trend that CDI helps to counteract. Examples like the discovery of PCSK9i loss-of-function variants enriched in some Black Americans highlight the potential of diverse scientific inquiry to lead to major medical breakthroughs that can help everyone. Critically, CDI's commitment to cultivating a diverse medical and scientific community is essential for connecting culturally with diverse patients and enhancing scientific engagement with diverse communities.

When did you become involved in the CDI? How has the center impacted your career?

My involvement with CDI began during my recruitment from Harvard Medical School, highlighted by a gala that showcased the rich legacy and diversity at MGH, convincing me of the unique journey that might lay ahead. Later, as chair of the CDI's Resident and Fellow Committee during my residency, I experienced firsthand how CDI effectively makes the vast ecosystem of MGH feel more intimate and supportive. CDI is a shrinking force. The profound impact of CDI on my career trajectory has been indispensable and has been instrumental in part to why I am here.

How has this institution changed since you arrived?

While I was not the first Black resident or chief resident in my program, I was the *sole* Black resident in my large class at MGH in 2011. Recently, we celebrated this evolution in diversity at the Department of Medicine's Rebecca Lee Crumpler event, attended by several hospital leaders. Observing the current graduating class, now the largest group of Black residents graduating

in Medicine in MGH's history, fills me with pride. Having met these trainees, I'm confident they will address diverse challenges worldwide and their impact will undoubtedly resonate for generations.

What are the most exciting things happening in your world right now?

One of the most exciting developments in my field right now is the evolving understanding in sports cardiology of the diverse phenotypic variations seen in athletes around the world. Particularly, we're gaining a deeper appreciation for the range of cardiovascular traits observed in athletes, including those from Black populations, which were previously misidentified as pathological. This awareness is not just niche science; it profoundly informs the care of many in our community across all backgrounds and is especially relevant for those with physically demanding occupations like military personnel, firefighters, and police officers. We are beginning to embrace this diversity to better understand the normal spectrum of human physiology and in so doing can more rigorously addressing significant questions, such as disparities in sudden death rates and pronounced disease manifestations.

What do you do for fun?

For fun, I dedicate my weekends to coaching soccer and watching my three active kids (ages 5, 8, and 10 #ZoneDefense) play various sports. Alongside my co-coaches, we craft strategies and tactics to enhance our team's success, occasionally incorporating Artificial Intelligence techniques. Additionally, a decade ago, a key member of the CDI played a crucial role in securing excellent pre-school placements for them, which has been incredibly helpful and for which I have been so grateful.

To read more stories like Dr. Guseh's, click here or visit our website at massgeneral.org/cdi/resource-library/humans-of-cdi.