

# Finding our future doctors in Queens

By Dr. Umer Hassan

Special to the Eagle

Our country is facing a severe doctor shortage. As the need for doctors outpaces the supply, the U.S. is expected to see a shortfall of over 100,000 doctors in little more than 10 years.

Unsurprisingly, this scarcity will hit low-income and minority communities, who already lack access to qualified healthcare providers, hardest. As a second-year family practice resident at Jamaica Hospital Medical Center, I am part of the immediate solution. But I also have a duty as both a resident physician and member of the Committee of Interns and Residents/SEIU Union to embolden tomorrow's doctors.

I recently spoke with the PS 52 elementary students in Jamaica at their Career Day.

Twenty-five years before, in that same borough, I began my academic journey just like them as a lanky kindergartener. The idea of becoming a doctor was as far-removed from my everyday world as the next subway station. Partly because my world consisted primarily of collecting the latest special edition Happy Meal toy, but also because I was the son of a humble construction worker and a housewife.

My mother's English was broken and my father's hands hardened by labor. Shortly before I was born, my family emigrated from Pakistan. They were still figuring out how to navigate the bustling chaos of New York City life just as I was learning my ABCs. Crammed into a two-bedroom apartment, our family of five had no relatives or economic

support in a foreign country. Despite every obstacle — the long work days, the financial sacrifices, and the struggle to learn the language and customs of a new country — my parents never doubted my capacity to reach loftier ambitions, far removed from the simple world we had.

My dad encouraged my musings of a future career as a lawyer, an engineer, an astronaut or a doctor. He never let our surroundings, my race or socioeconomic status detract from my possibilities, but my pathway to becoming a doctor seemed inaccessible. I didn't know a community beyond my inner-city apartment, but my parents, teachers, and even pediatricians encouraged my dreams along my journey. Even while I was oblivious, they understood how vital it is to plant seeds of aiming

high, and then even higher, in young impressionable minds of those eager to learn.

As the summer break ends, New York City classrooms will fill with over 1 million students with dreams yet to be nurtured, and barriers still to circumvent. They are students who may aspire to become the next generation of doctors; doctors who will serve in communities which face the biggest shortfalls.

In a city as diverse as New York and a borough even more so, we owe it to the youngest in our community to bolster their dreams, encourage their reach and cheer them onward, just as the grown-ups of our childhood did for us.

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Photo courtesy of the Committee of Interns and Residents/SEIU