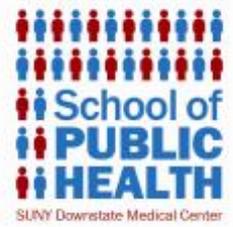


Alumni Profile: Kevin Purcell, MPH



Kevin working with a local healthcare worker in South Africa

Kevin Purcell is just one of SUNY Downstate's many young alumni striving to make a difference in the world through the field medicine and public health. For as long as he could remember, Kevin has always had an interest in preventive medicine, international health, and quality healthcare for underserved populations. Together, these three themes form the essence of what public health means to him. To Kevin, public health is about being of service to people no matter where he goes and providing health education and services to people of all backgrounds.

SUNY Downstate was Kevin's first choice for school when deciding to pursue a career in public health. Downstate's mission and community involvement complemented his desire to work with Brooklyn's diverse patient population. In public health, it is important to be able to work with disadvantaged groups in underserved communities and understand their needs. His experience studying in East Flatbush gave him an opportunity to learn about the many health disparities and inequities facing this community. Kevin credits his immense knowledge of public health to his experience with Brooklyn residents and to Downstate's amazing staff.

Kevin's interest in working with underserved communities motivated his decision to study Community Health Sciences. For his field experience he worked with the Choice Trust Organization in a rural village in South Africa. Kevin's skills were put to the test when he found himself in a village where almost no one spoke English and his only instructions were to "just help them." Determined to make the best of his experience, he spoke with the only two people who understood English and asked how he could help. He realized they were tasked with submitting paperwork to the South African Department of Public Health and although they had a computer, they didn't know how to use it and so they did everything by hand. Realizing the potential benefits of them using the technology, he taught them how to use Microsoft Office and soon oversaw a program training other villagers to do the same. Three residents were fully able to use computer programs by the end of his five-week rotation. In addition to his field experience, Kevin volunteered as a workshop facilitator for Kings Against Violence Initiative (KAVI), a program that addresses youth violence.

Kevin is now a fourth-year medical student at Wright State University's Boonshoft School of Medicine at Dayton, Ohio and will be starting his residency in orthopedic surgery at University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, MS later this year. He hopes to continue his work in public health through regular medical service missions. His time at Downstate taught him what a difference he could make in the world but more importantly, it gave him the confidence to go out of his comfort zone and do so. As he likes to say, "Growth never happens in the comfort zone, and smooth waters never made for skilled sailors!"