

Testimonials from 2018 FASPE Medical Fellows

History is our most important resource for thinking about the present. This program helped remind me and confront me with the power physicians hold in our society, both at the individual level and at the societal level. That power allows us to change things for the better or worse, as demonstrated by the actions of physicians in the Nazi era.

George Freigeh, FASPE Medical Fellow 2018

Two moments on the trip were particularly powerful for me. The first one was in Berlin when we visited Track 17 at the Grunewald train station, where we saw a memorial alongside the train tracks that had carried Jews to concentration camps and extermination centers like Auschwitz. Then, a few days later, we saw where those very same tracks ended: in Auschwitz-Birkenau. To be able to make this connection between the two places was incredibly meaningful and gave the trip an emotional arc that I would never have experienced had I been studying these topics on my own. The second moment occurred at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where we learned from our guide that residents of the surrounding town would often drop off food for prisoners at the perimeter of the camp. Our guide explained that the food had little effect overall on the nutrition of the prisoners there, but that even so, it provided hope to those inside. It was a powerful reminder that even if a problem in my community seems overwhelming, I shouldn't underestimate the impact of small gestures.

Melissa Lavoie, FASPE Medical Fellow 2018

In terms of my personal and professional development, FASPE was the single most meaningful experience I've had in medical school. Throughout the trip, I grew in dimensions that I had not imagined before the trip. The interdisciplinary nature of the trip allowed me to step back and view medicine from a more holistic angle. Using the power of place in Germany and Poland to explore contemporary issues in medical ethics propelled our discussions and left us all with new insights. Each conversation was firmly grounded in respect and humanity, while still challenging and pushing others to hone their beliefs and arguments. This is an experience I will never forget. My sincere appreciation to all who make it possible.

Christopher Magoon, FASPE Medical Fellow 2018

One location that really impacted me was the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. When I stood at the edge of it, the Memorial was impressive but seemed within my ability to take in. But as I walked into the middle of it and lost the sky and the surroundings I was overtaken by the vastness of what the Memorial invited me to contemplate: six million dead. And not just dead, but murdered. I realized that I could never really understand or grasp what happened. I just had to try to learn all that I could from it, and let it make me a better professional. That is what FASPE helped me to realize and what its community will continue to help me strive to do as I move forward from this singular program.

Andrew Perez, FASPE Medical Fellow 2018

FASPE has rediscovered what was classically the mission of the university: to confront young men and women with their history and culture and to challenge them to set out into the future darkness in search of a light. A community that often feels more like family, FASPE shows professionals the gravity of leadership, the value of true debate and the importance of friendship in an increasingly disorienting time. Standing upon the selection platform at Birkenau, I had only the comfort of my new friends to help carry

the burden of our collective past and envision a future brighter and reborn. Learning history at historical sites creates a visceral experience that imprints itself on the soul and forms the character. Despite the gravity and intensity of the two-week experience, I leave FASPE energized, not dejected; hopeful, not despairing; engaged, not afraid.

Joseph Scarpa Jr., FASPE Medical Fellow 2018

In the midst of an upper-class neighborhood, stand the train tracks at the Grunewald train station from which thousands of Jews were deported. As I walked down the platform reading about the successive deportations, I couldn't help but imagine what it would have looked like having groups two to 60 times the size of our fellowship group of about 30 leaving with all of their belongings. I felt overwhelmed... thousands of lives with their stories, their hopes, their dreams, their spheres of influence, their potential... all lost... all mercilessly torn away and destroyed. How could people knowingly participate in such evil and what had their neighbors seen and willingly ignored from the surrounding beautiful balconies? Yet, I have the same capacity for willful ignorance and inactivity and though this means I cannot judge or condemn others, it makes standing up for the right thing all the more important.

It's hard to put into words what FASPE has meant to me, but I am definitely a more thoughtful, conscientious future physician for experiences like this. I am moving forward committed to continuing to grapple with the immensity of evil and human suffering and the implications that has for me as an individual, citizen, and physician. However, I am even more committed to continuing to appreciate the simple things and connect even in the midst of suffering because love and relationships are what can best drive out darkness.

Kelly Schuering, FASPE Medical Fellow 2018

*The atrocities are in the past,
but memories will forever last.*

*I vividly remember these big dark blocks,
where innocent and fragile lives were locked.*

*In Auschwitz, unethical values prevailed.
In Auschwitz, the use of power within professions was derailed.*

*Lives were suffocated and ended;
Flesh was cremated.*

*That environment brought back memories from my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
Memories of hundreds of thousands of women, mostly pregnant, locked in cells for no reason.*

*Some were suffocated and didn't survive;
others survived, but the scars of such atrocities remained alive.*

*History will always repeat itself if professionals ignore the past.
The past was horrible, but repeating it is demonic.*

Such a dark past didn't occur overnight.

It was a process, which began by lapses of everyday ethics that built to such an uncontrollable situation. As a future leader in the medical field, I'll make it my duty to prevent any process that deviates from human values. Otherwise, once it grows, I'll be complicit.

No, I refuse to be a perpetrator.

Tshibambe Nathanael Tshimbombu, FASPE Medical Fellow 2018

One of the things that struck me the most during FASPE was visiting places such as the memorial site to medical killings in Brandenburg an der Havel or the Auschwitz concentration camp, where truly unimaginable things happened, and feeling the disconnect between the horrific history and the museums peacefully standing at these sites today. But then, when I would read the ethical justifications—whether it was eugenics, public health or research gains—behind some of the actions of the Nazi physicians, or those who profited from the victims, I would be uncomfortably reminded of conversations I had heard in the hospital, language used on the news, as well as more recent post-Holocaust history. I realized how principles of ethics could be contorted to justify victimizing others, and how, as physicians, we wield tremendous power in how we choose to exemplify ethical practice. I came away from the trip feeling almost physically shaken by the places we had experienced, and woken up with the urgency to act when I see unethical practices in my profession and in the world at large, especially when it targets a particular group of people. I also came away feeling that there were others in my profession—the fellow medical students and faculty on the trip—who felt this way, and that I could turn to them in the future if I had an ethical or professional dilemma for which I needed a good sounding board.

Vidya Viswanathan, FASPE Medical Fellow 2018