

Announcer:

Ahead on Tim Talk, Morehouse School of Medicine an historically Black Medical School in Atlanta and Northern Light Health joined forces to educate our next generation of healthcare professionals and diversify our workforce.

Tim Dentry:

Welcome faithful listeners, back to Tim Talk. This is Tim Dentry, CEO of Northern Light Health.

Those of us who have either spent all of our lives in Maine, I'm not so fortunate, but I am fortunate that I've been here for that pretty substantial period of my life by now. We all know that our state is among the oldest and yes, least diverse states in the country. At Northern Light Health, we are helping to change that. Why? You might ask. Because it is the right thing to do and it's a smart thing to do. We're going to point out an example today that drives home both of those points.

In order to recruit the next generation of healthcare workers, we need to open our arms, hearts, and minds to all individuals who could add to the quality of life of Northern Light, our communities and our state. We have many initiatives underway in this regard, and today, we would like to share one pretty great solution to help attract talent to the state of Maine and add to our diverse family too. This past year we introduced an amazing program in partnership with Morehouse School of Medicine. Here today with me to talk about this program with Morehouse is Darmita Wilson, Vice President Medical Education and Research for Northern Light Health and Hillary Barrago, one of the first Morehouse students to graduate from the Northern Light Health Clerkship Program last fall. Darmita and Hillary, thank you for joining me.

Darmita Wilson:

Thank you so much for the invite.

Hillary Barrago:

Thank you for having me.

Tim Dentry:

Wonderful. Darmita, let's get started. You were certainly the driving force behind many initiatives, but in particular, behind launching this program, can you share with our audience what the Clerkship Program is and how do we come together with Morehouse School of Medicine of all places?

Darmita Wilson:

Well, great, Tim, thank you so much. So the Clerkship Program, the clerkship section of training for physician assistants is a second year of training for the master's prepared physician assistant students from Morehouse School of Medicine located in Atlanta, Georgia. Morehouse is a historically Black university and college, and the first year of training is dedicated to clinical knowledge in all areas of medical practice. The second year is where Northern Light Health System comes in to develop a hub for rural medicine and health practice.

The way that this came about is that I'm a graduate of Howard University at Historically Black College, and after training I became the executive director of Howard University Hospital and worked with Howard University School of Medicine, School of Allied Health and School of Dentistry students. I worked with the graduate medical education department where I was in constant worship with Dr. Linwood McAllister, who has since become the assistant clinical director at Morehouse. So once he discovered that I had moved to Maine of all places, he gave me a call because he was interested in a rural health track for those students. So we discussed it, we talked about it, and I thought that Northern Light

Health would be the best place for these students to get the best educational experience from some of the best providers in the state of Maine. So we worked on it, we started working on it in June and in September of 2023, we invited our first four trailblazing students to Maine, and Hillary was one of those students and it was a tremendous success.

Tim Dentry:

Thank you, Darmita. And obviously Dr. McAllister, those that are loyal listeners to these Tim Talk podcasts has been a guest on our talks two times, I believe, already. So that's one thing I wanted to call out. The second thing is, this is action. This is a great vision. This is a great intention and wanting to make a difference and an impact that's backed up by action and that is wonderful.

So Darmita, the hope, as you said, is that the Clerkship Program will provide opportunities for young developing professionals to learn more about our state, see the opportunities for their own personal professional growth and do good for others and become upstanding citizens in our communities in the process.

Of course, it may lead to recruiting talented young people like Hillary. This is where you come in Hillary, to come work for Northern Light once they graduate. The program has received a lot of buzz, a lot of coverage. Can you tell us about that and what's next for the program?

Darmita Wilson:

Oh, certainly Tim. The national response has been unbelievable. After the completion of phase one with the first set of students completing their rotation year at Northern Light, we have received recognition from the ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox affiliates. Most recently, a published white paper from the American Hospital Association as a groundbreaking solution to the practitioner shortages that are already occurring across the United States. What's next is one of the most exciting parts where the students, while they were here, the first original four students, received an invitation from the Maine House of Representatives to meet Madam Speaker of the House, Rachel Talbot Ross, to discuss innovative ways of bringing more practitioners to Maine by way of programs like this. So we're really excited about that part.

Tim Dentry:

Excellent. And so now let's hear from someone who's really made the commitment, took the plunge, came to Maine, and so of course Hillary, we're talking with you now. I'm so glad you're with us today, and so glad you made that commitment and it was great seeing you here not too long ago. You were part of that first class of physician assistant students to join this clerkship program. How did you find out about it? Why did you sign up? And more importantly, what did it feel like?

Hillary Barrago:

So we first found out about the whole going to Maine. There's a clerkship, there's a rotation in Maine. We found that out in July of last year, and a few of us kind of jumped up at the opportunity. It's like, oh, it's out of state. A lot of us, actually, none of us ever been to Maine. We all knew where it was on the map. Okay, yeah, Maine is up there, but so it was like, okay, we get to go out, step outside of our comfort zones, get to see Maine, get to work in rural areas. It's another thing that we can add on to our resumes. We worked in rural medicine, so it was just like this is a really good opportunity. And before we knew it, we were out in Maine.

Tim Dentry:

That's really fabulous. And it just reminded me, I was talking with someone today who hadn't been to really Maine and hadn't quite experienced rural medicine, as you say. And so I asked this individual how they would define rural medicine, and they asked me the same question. And what I shared is that rural

medicine sometimes to those, and I know a lot of our listeners, I'm singing to the choir here, but a lot of people that don't know what it really means, it really is, talk about rural health and rural medicine as a place that's lacking. And I said, "We don't start from a place that's lacking. We start from a place that's very unique and it's very community, tight-knit." And yes, the depth of resources, we don't have the population density. So maybe the depth of resources to draw from there, but that's why it's so essential and important that we connect and engage with people who are part of the community and whose professional careers are going to be advanced within this rural health.

And if we don't do it, it isn't going to get done. So it's even more vital and more essential. So I think for our listeners, and just to set the tone, I just want to make sure that people understand that that's where we're coming from and it sounds like Hillary and what I know of you, that's where you're coming from too. Do you want to Hillary, you want to respond to that? And then I'd like to ask the same of Darmita, rural health?

Hillary Barrago:

Yes. Rural health is similar to what you said. For me it's more so access to receiving adequate healthcare because a lot of the times we're always trying to treat the problem rather than the patient. And that's what I feel like people think of rural health is okay, these people that live out in wherever, however many miles away from the nearest hospital, we're just trying to make sure that their COPD is taken care of, or their heart failure is taken care of. Okay, but what about the actual person? What can we do for the actual person to make sure that they're nursed to health? They can be who they can be if they're provided to their family or etc. Whatever they are to their family would make sure we take care of them. And then that will take care of whatever problem or disorder that they have. And I think with rural areas specifically, they have that kind of lack of access to receive that healthcare or they just are not willing to get that because of lack of trust within the system. So that's my thing of I really want to get out into those rural communities and let them know that there are people out here that are willing and want to treat you, want to take care of you as a person, want to get to know you, want to make sure that you're good. That's my whole spiel on that.

Tim Dentry:

That's a wonderful spiel, Hillary. "What about the actual person?" Is what you said. And that is wonderful. And you also touched on trust, and that really strikes a chord with me because like everything that's meaningful in life without trust, it's just really, really difficult. And again, I think in this day and age, we need to earn trust, we need to work harder for trust. And it sounds like this is a way to bridge that is what you're saying to me and to our listeners. Darmita, how about you? Rural health? What do you think of?

Darmita Wilson:

Oh, wow. We don't have enough time to talk about it, but for me, I think I agree with you a 100%, Tim, starting with trust, but looking at trust from a perspective of just health equity for all people. If we truly believe that healthcare is a right, and I do, I think that it's important coming from a system like Northern Light Health and what it really means to be a part of a community that we focus on not only health equity in terms of patient access, quality care, but we take care of the whole individual, as Hillary indicated. It is so easy for us to just look at the numbers, to look at where the people are, but for those people that we don't see that often, for those people that really don't have a trust of the healthcare system, they need to understand that there are people out there that are just like them, who are healthcare providers, who want to treat them because they deserve that service. So that's a part of that, building that trust and letting them know how we feel about them. There are people we want to serve them, and we want to do it to the best of our ability.

Tim Dentry:

There are people that want to serve them. That is absolutely wonderful. So Hillary back to you. I'd like to see if you could describe for our listeners some of the positive experiences as you navigated this Clerkship Program. What do you remember of your time in Maine? What comes to mind?

Hillary Barrago:

I liked the fact that during our time, I was doing the internal medicine rotation while I was in Maine, and I just liked or appreciated the fact that the preceptors were so hands-on with us. They cared about our learning. They wanted to make sure we saw different things. They wanted to make sure that they were teaching us and making sure we were learning from our experience. I didn't feel like an outsider. I felt very comfortable where I was. They didn't make me feel like... I just felt really, really comfortable. I felt really, really good. Everyone was very welcoming and was very friendly. Even people who are not my preceptors were like, "Oh, you're a student. Come here, let's look at this thing." And I just really appreciated the fact that people took our learning into their hands. They wanted to make sure that we got everything that we could possibly get from this experience. We are sponges, as students, we just want to make sure we soak up everything. We want to soak up as much knowledge as we can, especially during this time. This is the time to do so because once you get out in the real world, it's a little harder to soak up information. I really do appreciate that.

Tim Dentry:

Very good. What about your time specifically in Maine? Hopefully, all of the faculty and others didn't make you have the nose to the grindstone, as they say, in your training program in the courtship program for the whole time. So when you were off duty, what about Maine? What sticks in your mind about the state of Maine?

Hillary Barrago:

The state of Maine, it wasn't what I initially anticipated. I was telling my mom before went, I was so scared. I'm like, is there going to be any stores? Am I going to have phone reception? What am I getting myself into? But when I got there, it seemed a little similar to where I went to undergrad as far as there are stuff around, it's just not as much stuff as it is in the big cities. So it was something that I was familiar with. There was a store. I know every time I say I say it wrong, but I'm going to just say if Mardine's? Marden's? I'm not really sure.

Tim Dentry:

Yes, Marden's.

Hillary Barrago:

You could not get out of that store. If they had a store like that down here, I would probably set up shop and sleep there. That was one of my favorite places to go to. Even in Prescott where we went, there was one right across the street from our hotel, and I was there almost like... I cut back from going every other day to almost like every other week. So yeah-

Tim Dentry:

I love it. And for all of our listeners, yes, this podcast is paid for by Marden's. No, just kidding. That's really cool. Hillary, that was the same way. My mother-in-Law when she comes into town from New York City, by God, she's got a head to Marden's, so that's wonderful. So also, what's next for you, Hillary, in your career?

Hillary Barrago:

So right now I'm on clerkship number 7 out of 10. I'm doing my family medicine rotation, and then I have my surgery, women's health, and then my elective rotations afterwards. And then once I finish rotations, they're having us do some pants prep work to prepare for our board as well as exit exams and exit procedures that we have to do just to make sure that we are adequately prepared to go out and be the best providers that we can be. So I'm just taking it one step at a time. I'm not even trying to think about all that then just every day is a new day. That's how I'm trying to roll with it for right now. Trying to enjoy being a student.

Darmita Wilson:

And don't forget graduation in December.

Hillary Barrago:

Exactly, see, that's the main goal. That's the big thing.

Tim Dentry:

That is wonderful. Let me just ask a conversation topping off question and maybe Darmita will give Hillary the last word. So I'll address it. You can go first. Anything else you want to share while we have the time and while we have the listener's ear? Anything else you'd like to share on this topic or anything else about developing people and our passion for people's professional careers, Darmita?

Darmita Wilson:

Well, Northern Light Health has always been innovative. We stand heads above anybody else, in my opinion, as it relates to innovation in Maine. And this is an opportunity for us to take medical education to a new height, to give future practitioners the opportunity to really understand what rural medicine is and how wide encompassing it is as it relates to a healthcare delivery. To really focus on patient access, patient quality, patient safety, all of the things that we so dear to our hearts here at Northern Light. And I would hope that more programs would be developed in this manner. We are not stopping. Our challenge, thanks to you, Tim, and your leadership as it relates to really understanding the importance of this in medical education. So we are excited about it. We are moving forward and we're going to expand as far as you allow us.

Tim Dentry:

Wonderful, thank you. And before I wrap up, Hillary, you got the last word. What are your final thoughts?

Hillary Barrago:

My final thoughts, I'm just very appreciative of being able to come out to Maine and meet everybody that I met. So it was Dr. White, impressed guy. He was great. He was my main preceptor. I just want to make sure he's doing good and let him know that I appreciate him. There is Hillary Boucher, she was the PA that I worked with. She was really great as well. There's Jamie Grimshure, I hope I didn't butcher her last name. She worked in the cardiology department. She was also very nice to us. And then Dr. Aldere very, very, I learned a lot from him as far as the cardiovascular part of life goes, I just want to make sure I extend my appreciation to them and thank them for taking the time out to teach us and just make sure they guided our learning. I also wanted to give a big shout-out to Dr. Marwaha, she very much took care of us in all different kinds of ways. She took us under her wing in the emergency department in EMMC, and

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we just really, really appreciate her for even giving us the opportunity to shadow her and be with her during that time. So a big shout-out to Dr. Marwaha.

Tim Dentry:

That is wonderful, and I'm glad. I'm so thankful that you pointed that out. And you mentioned their names Hillary, that's amazing. And that's also a part, I think of what both of you have said, that it's a reminder to me and hopefully reminder to listeners that as we work with individuals like you Hillary, and as we work in helping to either share our knowledge or assist people in their careers, etc., it also feels really good to do that and it's another way to help others. So thank you so much both of you for pointing that out. And Darmita and Hillary, thank you so much for being here with me and sharing more, not only about this program, but what it means to people.

And thank you to our podcast listeners as well. So until next time, this is Tim Dentry encouraging you to listen, listen, listen and act to promote our culture of caring, diversity, and inclusion, which always starts with caring for one another. Thank you.

Announcer:

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