

By Mitchell Hayes, M2, and Monisha Bhatia, M2

The fifth annual summit of Students for a National Health Program was held at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., on March 5. Nearly 170 students from 48 schools in 22 states gathered in Music City to discuss the advancing single payer movement, and the role medical students and future residents will continue to play in making single payer a reality.

Many sessions of the daylong event highlighted this year's summit theme: "New Frontiers of the Civil Rights Movement."

Our keynote speaker, Vanderbilt's Dr. Stephen Raffanti, began with reflections on the HIV epidemic and its relationship to achieving universal health care for all. He took us on a historical tour of the civil rights movement, and described some of the activists who carried that movement's legacy into the 1980s and 1990s in response to the HIV epidemic.

More generally, he underscored the importance of having passionate, persistent advocates in the struggle for a life-and-death cause – citing the role of physicians who vigorously advocate for their patients' best interests (including the need for single payer) as an example.

After the keynote, we dispersed into breakout sessions on topics ranging from "Single Payer 101" to "Mental health disparities among marginalized populations" to "Legislative power mapping." Students had the opportunity to reflect, debate, and postulate with peers in an intimate setting.

At lunch, students met with local PNHP physician mentors who spoke firsthand about their lives of advocacy in medicine. This new addition to the conference schedule was well received by students. The informal dialogue over barbecue was one of the highlights of the day.

The afternoon breakout sessions shifted the focus to strategy. SNaHP veterans took the stage to identify concrete steps students can take in medical school to influence politics and policy makers. Key sessions addressed Bird-Dogging and Lobbying, with students laying out plans for how to approach candidates running for office, record their support for single payer, and revisit them once elected in order to keep them accountable for promises made on the campaign trail.

First-time summit-goers like us were electrified to hear all of the work that seasoned students had already accomplished. The group then split up by region to discuss how we could imple-

ment similar strategies. We ended by setting specific regional goals to achieve by next year's summit.

The wrap-up of the meeting included the traditional goodbyes and thank-yous to everyone who had contributed to its success. But then Scott Goldberg, M4 at the University of Chicago, unexpectedly took the podium to show a YouTube clip from the movie "Braveheart" – the famous segment in which William Wallace urged on his troops before the final battle with the English Army.

Laughter and cheers were heard up and down the halls as Scott narrated the scene, point-

ing out the metaphorical insurance and pharmaceutical companies and their lobbyist knights.

After the conference, many of the students gathered at a local pub.

Having the summit in Nashville (all previous ones were held in Chicago) allowed students from new SNaHP chapters across the South – from Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, Texas, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Tennessee – to show up in record numbers. As students at the host school, we could not help but feel a swell of pride at the large southern turnout.

As medical students in the South, we constantly see the need for a single-payer system during our work in hospitals and clinic. Every day we see how many people health care reform has left behind. But we also face a steep slope when it comes to changing local opinions about Medicare for All, often among those same patients and their families.

The summit was a much-needed opportunity for us to learn from more experienced chapters how we can make progress toward that goal, and to gain strength from our peers. We hope that the SNaHP Summit will return to Nashville for some more southern hospitality soon!



Medical students from across the U.S. gather in Nashville for the SNaHP Summit. Photos: Mark Chee



Dr. Stephen Raffanti