

Humans of CDI

Sandra M Saade-Lemus, M.D.

PGY-4, Harvard MGH/BWH Neurology Residency

Vice Chair, Center for Diversity and Inclusion's Resident and Fellow Committee



Dr. Sandra Saade is a senior neurology resident at Harvard's MGH/BWH program and the Vice Chair for the CDI's Resident and Fellow Committee. She served as the Public Relations Chair for the CDI last year. Her main clinical and research area of interest is the overlap between sleep disorders and neurodegenerative conditions.

Sandra was born in Valledupar, Colombia. She completed her medical doctorate at Universidad del Rosario in Bogota, the oldest medical school in the country (founded in 1653!). She completed a research fellowship in Philadelphia with the University of Pennsylvania before moving to Boston to start her medicine internship at Mass General. After residency, she will sub-specialize in Sleep Medicine.

As an immigrant, she is very interested in the impact that cultural competence and socioeconomic background has in the health prevention and treatment adherence of her patients. She strongly believes multicultural health care teams with UiM trainees and faculty result in improved clinical care, especially in the diverse Boston-area and international population we care for at MGH.

To delve deeper into Sandra's story, discover her sources of hope and the advice she'd offer UiM trainees, read on.

How have you been involved in the RFC and what led you to join the board?

I first heard about the CDI and the RFC when I started my medicine internship at MGH. My intern year started at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and the CDI community became my anchor during this time as a new trainee. I then became public relations chair after my neurology attending and mentor Dr. Marcelo Matiello suggested it and shared his experience with me (he was a public relations chair when he was a resident!).

What excites you most about being RFC Vice Chair?

I am very excited about our upcoming plans for community outreach, especially with Hispanic immigrants and other underserved communities in the Boston area! And I'm also very grateful to have the opportunity to closely interact and mentor our SRTP Summer students.

When you think about your experience with CDI and the RFC, what's your proudest moment?

My proudest moment so far has been working as a team with my RFC Board colleagues last year to increase visibility for the CDI events, and specifically working with my public relations co-chair at the time and now friend, psych resident Alejandra!

If you were to give one piece of advice to our UiM trainees, what would it be?

To find a community in the workplace that can help keep you grounded (hopefully at the CDI!). It is important to share your experiences with other UiM trainees and faculty who can connect with you and understand the challenges unique to our UiM background.

What would it take to achieve equity and/or a truly equitable workforce at MGH?

Acknowledging the tacit advantages that most non-minority staff experience, and work to increase the representation of UiM staff which results in making these advantages a reality to UiM as well. Examples of these advantages include: 1) easier connection with your coworkers due to shared educational, cultural, geographic, language background; 2) easier access to networking opportunities; 3) prior knowledge of the so-called “hidden curriculum” or unspoken expectations and rules of a prevalent culture in the work environment.

What change have you witnessed and what’s left to be done?

I witnessed the mindset shift we had during the pandemic as healthcare workers; mental health and burn out are at the forefront of our discussions now more than ever. I have also witnessed the CDI’s evolution and growing resident and fellow participation. I anticipate we will continue to increase awareness about the importance of community for our trainees, as well as expanding the size and impact of the CDI across MGH!

What gives you hope?

Human connection. Every time I feel a connection with my patients, my colleagues, my family and friends, it gives me motivation, inspiration, and hope for the future.

Tell us about your heritage. How does your heritage influence your work?

I grew up and also trained as a doctor in Colombia, my family is Lebanese-Colombian, and I have close family in Spain which led me to spend time in Barcelona as a rotating medical student. I have first-hand experience with healthcare systems outside of the US, different low-resource settings, and how medicine is practiced in other countries such as Colombia and Spain, and this definitely impacts every aspect of my thought process now as a resident physician. For example, the financial impact of our work up and treatment decisions on our patients is always on the top of my mind.

What is the most important thing you have learned in the past five years?

Our life decisions should be based on intrinsic motivation (what truly makes you happy or will bring you peace) and not extrinsic validation.