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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL of  
MATERNAL and CHILD HEALTH and AIDS  
ISSN 2161-864X (Online)  
ISSN 2161-8674 (Print)  
DOI: 10.21106/ijma.463

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD | MCH STUDENT ASSOCIATION

# The Global Alliance for Maternal and Child Health (GLAM): A Pioneer Organization for MCH Students

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## ABSTRACT

Currently, there is an insufficient representation of racial/ethnic minority groups in the maternal and child health (MCH) workforce. A student-run outreach organization, the Global Alliance for Maternal and Child Health (GLAM), seeks to address this disparity by increasing the representation of racial/ethnic minority groups in MCH workforce. Founded by students at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas, United States, GLAM, seeks to establish productive alliances and create programs that would help improve the well-being of mothers, infants, and children locally, nationally, and internationally by engaging an active cadre of students passionate about MCH. Through community outreach and global engagement using evidence-based strategies, GLAM is committed to the elimination of health disparities plaguing the MCH population.

**Key words:** • Maternal and Child Health • Pipeline program • Students-driven • Community outreach • Global engagement

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## 1. Background and Introduction

The United States (US) is tagged as the nation of immigrants, with an estimated 70 million foreign-born people projected to be living in the US within the next 40 years.<sup>1</sup> The racial and ethnic composition of the US has been changing substantially for the last few decades due to the increase in immigration.<sup>1</sup> Given that most immigrants to the US belong to racial/ethnic minority groups, it is important that attention is focused on improving equity in access to health care to address emerging health disparities that disproportionately and adversely affect racial/ethnic minorities.<sup>1</sup>

Currently there is an insufficient representation of racial/ethnic minority groups in the maternal and child health (MCH) workforce.<sup>2</sup> This poses significant cultural and linguistic barriers, in addition to biases towards patients from diverse backgrounds and providers' clinical uncertainty when treating disparate populations.<sup>3,4</sup> Therefore, it is important that academic institutions recruit and train students from heterogeneous racial/ethnic minority populations and those from disadvantaged backgrounds in order to have a more effective MCH workforce capable of addressing contemporary challenges of health equity and racial/ethnic health disparities.

One of the aspirations of MCH practitioners such as the Maternal and Child Health Bureau<sup>5</sup> and the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs<sup>6</sup> is the development of a pipeline of next generation of MCH practitioners. The training and development of emerging MCH professionals is particularly important for the establishment of a diverse and inclusive public health specialty. The involvement of student associations in pipeline development has been a tried and tested strategy and is well established in various fields of medicine such as obstetrics and gynecology psychology etc.<sup>6-8</sup>

To address the poor participation of minorities in MCH and to establish a functional pipeline for the next generation of MCH professionals, students at the Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas, USA, in 2019, created a student outreach organization, named the Global Alliance for Maternal and Child Health (GLAM). GLAM, evidently the first student professional organization of students with interest in MCH, was created to establish productive alliances and create programs that would help improve the well-being of mothers, infants, and children locally, nationally, and internationally. Through community outreach and global engagement using evidence-based strategies, the organization is committed to the elimination of health disparities plaguing the maternal and child health population. In this paper, we describe the strategy, objectives, and core values guiding the organization. We conclude with a description of the organization's accomplishments and reflect on the policy and practice implications of this premiere student organization.

## 2. Strategy

A group of 18 students that were completing the MCH Student Training for Academic Readiness and Success (MCH STARS) program identified the unmet needs of student leadership and involvement in the MCH community. Motivated to positively impact their local communities and apply the skills gained from the MCH STARS training program, the students came together to plan and create GLAM. The students worked tirelessly to establish the name, vision, priorities, core values, mission, objectives, future activities, logo, and colors for the organization.

The organization was officially inaugurated on November 15, 2019. With a vision to establish GLAM, the students and advisors are striving to make it one of the world's preeminent student organizations that will be recognized for its excellent service through the provision of collaborative initiatives, informative tools, and innovative research to improve MCH.

### 2.1. Objectives

The students, with the guidance of their advisors, devised the objectives and core-values of GLAM. It is envisioned that this association will:

- a) Provide student members the platform to develop MCH leadership and professional skills;
- b) Offer collaborative opportunities to students and the community for MCH advancement and global engagement;
- c) Educate communities about MCH-related prevention, treatment, and management of diseases and health conditions;
- d) Promote awareness, provide resources, and strengthen MCH research towards the elimination of health disparities, especially in underserved communities; and
- e) Develop and increase the number of underrepresented minorities in the MCH pipeline and subsequently workforce.

### 2.2. Core Values

In order to deliver on these objectives, GLAM members have adopted six core values. These core values are meant to reflect the heart of the organization including:

- a) Excellence – putting our best efforts forth in all we do;
- b) Student-centered – utilizing strategies and approaches that keep the interests, skills, and cultural backgrounds of each individual student-member as the focus;
- c) Team-oriented – working collaboratively to lead effective change and improvement for MCH populations;
- d) Educate – engaging peers, community, and MCH population through sharing of knowledge and best practices;
- e) Empowerment – empowering individuals at

the local, national, and international levels to advocate for MCH health equity for all; and

- f) MCH advancement – continued training and development of adaptive leaders to drive support and improvements in MCH health-related issues.

### 2.3. Logo

GLAM designed a logo which represents the mission of the organization. The logo shows a pregnant woman and her unborn fetus facing the world. This represents the health outcomes for a mother and child that need to be improved by the concerted efforts of the global community (Figure 1).

## 3. Preliminary Accomplishments

After nearly 12 months of successful operation following its inauguration, GLAM has brought some transformation in the field. These include participating in community service and health fair events to demonstrate passion, love and care as they distributed health education materials, feminine products, and sanitizing products to those in need in the Houston, Texas communities. Future plans for the organization include hosting an MCH Career Pathway Day, creating an MCH internship and scholarship board, participation in a community action network



**Figure 1:** Global Alliance for Maternal and Child Health (GLAM) logo

with local MCH-focused organizations, and hosting a weekly social media MCH trivia campaign. In the next 12 months, GLAM leadership plans do the following:

- 1) Organize an upcoming virtual national conference where the students from various universities in the US will participate and showcase their work towards improving MCH equity;
- 2) Plan and organize an upcoming mentee-mentor workshop on “How to write a scientific journal article;” and
- 3) Plan and organize a mentee-mentor retreat to reinforce professional development in a fun and casual way.

## 4. Discussion and Implications for Policy and Practice

In addition to traditional classroom environments, student organizations play important roles in students’ professional development serve important roles part of a students’ professional growth during their collegiate careers and students gain invaluable knowledge and experience through active participation. Student organizations offer the opportunity for students to develop and cultivate soft skills, leadership skills, and networking skills in safe practical environments, which would be extremely beneficial to them once they join the workforce. Students have the power to impact the health of local communities through implementation of educational outreach program to facilitate access to MCH education and knowledge to the various strata of the society, such as those residing in rural areas, those who are undocumented, or even among middle and high school students. Students reflecting on their engagement in participatory sessions reported GLAM programs have assisted them in fostering a broader sense of community and also reinforced their own career trajectories.

Developing a pipeline of engaged MCH workforce dedicated to transforming health care systems is critical to bringing about a change in MCH care. Dissemination of programs such as GLAM may help engage undergraduate students early in their training, thus building a new generation of MCH leaders. We believe that GLAM has carved a path for future student led organizations in pursuit of

health equity and a diverse MCH workforce that reflects the evolving demographics of the US. Other universities could utilize the GLAM model to further their own health equity projects and strategies to create a talented, diverse MCH workforce that is prepared to handle the future healthcare challenges facing our communities.

### Compliance With Ethical Standards

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**Financial Disclosure:** None. **Funding/Support:** None. **Ethics**

**Approval:** None required. **Acknowledgements:** None. **Disclaimer:** Not applicable.

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