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AKRON

Akron high schoolers learn about healthcare careers from Black doctors at summit

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Summa Health Neurosurgeon Aaron Palmer leads a demonstration at the Future Healthcare Leaders' Summit on Tuesday at the University of Akron Student Union. Courtesy of Maureen Nagg



AKRON, Ohio – About 30 doctors from area hospitals gave hands-on healthcare demonstrations to Akron Public Schools students Tuesday at the second annual Future Healthcare Leaders' Summit at the University of Akron Student Union.

Physicians from Summa Health, Cleveland Clinic Akron General, Western Reserve Hospital, Akron Children's Hospital and NEOMED took part in the event, which was attended by 200 students from Akron Public Schools' Garfield, Firestone, North and Buchtel high schools.

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What makes this summit different from other healthcare events is most of the physicians who participated are Black.

Akron native and East High graduate Aaron Palmer was one of the physicians in attendance. Palmer, who graduated from Wright State University School of Medicine and completed his neurosurgery residency [joined the Summa Health team](#) this summer, according to the hospital.

Taking part in the summit was a full-circle moment for Palmer, who said being a neurosurgeon wasn't something he thought about growing up in Akron. Palmer grew up one of 7-8 people in a two-bedroom house and he recalls his parents living paycheck to paycheck, he said.

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“I didn’t even know that the job of being a doctor existed. I mean, I knew doctors existed, but I never really put that on the table for myself because I didn’t think it was a possibility,” Palmer told [cleveland.com](#) and [The Plain Dealer](#). “We only ever went to the doctor if it was an emergency and even then, I never saw any doctors who looked like me, at least back then.”

Only about 5.7% of physicians, residents and fellows among the 48 largest specialties in the U.S. identify as Black or African American, [according to recent data](#) from the Association of American Medical Colleges. Approximately 12.1% of the U.S. population is Black or African American, [according to recent U.S. Census Bureau data](#).

The hospitals that participated in the summit are hoping to inspire more students of color to pursue careers in medicine, including beyond becoming nurses or doctors.

The goal of the summit is to increase the number of healthcare providers from the area who return to practice medicine in Northeast Ohio, according to Summa’s Director, Inclusion and Equity for Graduate Medical Education Yoleetah Ilodi.

Inspiring more students to consider healthcare careers is about more than jobs, though. Evidence shows people perceive that they report better health outcomes when they receive care from someone who looks like them, according to Palmer.

“I think that any patient would prefer somebody that looks like them or has the same culture as them,” he said. “It makes them feel represented. And the outcomes also show that the care provided is better when that’s the case. Well, at least the perceived outcomes.”

For students considering their futures, Palmer offers this advice:

“Work hard and don’t give up, regardless of what you want to do,” he said. “Do your research and then reach out to people who have already done what you want to do and get advice from them. A lot of times these students from disadvantaged backgrounds experience failure; but this is going to guide them where they are going if they don’t give up.”