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AAPI

Asian American
& Pacific Islander
Heritage Month

With the last name Mathew, patients can at times appear visibly disappointed that I am a physician of color, and it is only after demonstrating no accent, clinical acumen, and a pleasant bedside manner that the encounter normalizes. Once they hear that I am of Indian descent, I have heard questions like are you the "dot kind" or the "feather kind" OR "the brown kind" or the "red kind"?

- Paul G Mathew, MD, DNBPAS, FAAN, FAHS,
Assistant Professor of Neurology



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[My parents] moved from South Korea to Idaho in 1973, with an infant child, very little money, and very little English. Their first jobs were on a potato farm. Ironically, they had never eaten potatoes in South Korea. My parents' humble beginnings in the US had an enormous impact on my own personal expectations and outlook on life.

Growing up, I was always one of very few Asians at the schools I attended. To be honest, I was often resentful of some of the stereotypes I dealt with. As a child, it was sometimes tough being different. Yet, I would like to believe that these challenges have shaped exactly who and where I am today. As these things have bothered me less as I grew up, it's fascinating to see concepts like "racial microaggressions" being characterized and talked about more openly. I appreciate being part of a diverse society, and strive to be as open and inclusive to peers, friends, and strangers alike.

- Alexander Kim, MD; Pain Management Attending



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Being British Chinese has shaped so much of my identity. My favourite memories are with my entire extended family barely squeezed around the dining table commanded by my grandmother's firm instruction on the correct way to fold a dumpling so the filling did not explode when cooked. Inevitably, us kids would end up covered in flour with one dog-eared, inelegantly squat dumpling produced between us.

It hasn't always been straightforward; I grew up in a predominantly white neighbourhood and my Chinese snacks and lunches were mocked at school. The irony is that these are now seen as trendy foods by the same people, a decade and a half later. Since the pandemic and rise in AAPI hate crimes, random people on the street have made racist remarks at me. Once, I was even physically attacked on a sunny Sunday afternoon in broad daylight. As a result, my parents were hesitant to even walk outside in our local park. Just recently, we wanted to enjoy the cherry blossom and my father looked stoic, he remained two steps behind my mother and I, keeping vigilant watch in case of aggression. To us, this is unacceptable. Our community has drawn tighter and closer together, but the sad fact is that none of this surprises us. Ultimately, I couldn't be prouder of belonging to the AAPI community and welcome anyone to join me at my dining table for a freshly steamed plate of dumplings.

- Alice Tang, MD; Resident Physician



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I was born in Myanmar and grew up in the suburbs of Cleveland. Growing up as an immigrant, I bore witness to much racism and hatred directed at my family. But I also saw the sheer depths of generosity and kindness. From my parents, I learned strength and resilience. From our early experiences, I gained the firm belief that diversity must be not only be cherished, but also nourished. It is with this lens that I come to work every day.

It is an honor to be part of the AAPI community, and I hope to play my role as an advocate: for my patients' needs to be recognized, for their voices to be heard, to affirm that their unique stories matter. I want to strive toward a diverse and inclusive health care system that tackles health inequities head on.

- Khin-Kyemon Aung, MD, MBA; Resident Physician



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I am a Chinese-American children of immigrants who grew up in New Jersey. Growing up, I would shun this identity, choosing to respond only in English to my parents' Cantonese and rejected aspects of my family's culture and history to attempt to assimilate. It wasn't until college, when I moved to the Midwest, where I developed a strong sense of identity and pride in who I am and my family's journey. It was the first time that I took Asian American and diaspora history classes and realized that I am part of a collective AAPI identity in America that demands increased public attention and advocacy. Recent increased coverage of Anti-Asian violence and racism have finally shined a bright light on AAPI discrimination and how heterogenous the population is, which has often hidden behind the shroud of the model minority myth. Being AAPI has made me keenly aware of the disparities in how public services are delivered and how communities are treated by others, especially towards English as second language speakers and people of color. It has only motivated me to work towards identifying and addressing these inequities to ensure that the care and treatment towards communities of color are better than the experiences my own family experienced.

- Delia Shen, MD; Resident Physician



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Being AAPI in Tennessee meant I had a small, tight-knit community of other AAPI-identifying friends who had similar backgrounds as I do. The vast majority of us were kids of immigrants who moved to America in hopes for a better future for our families. While my parents were very intentional ensuring we grew up proud of our heritage, it was always difficult finding representation of people who looked like me or had my background outside my immediate circles. Going to college was the first time I met people who were second- or third-generation Asian Americans, where I learned about Asian American history and the role we played in shaping this country, both its up and downsides. I move through my life aware of how my being an Asian American woman shapes how people see me and how I interact with others; it also impacts my passion toward equitable care for people of all backgrounds in the US!

- Jennifer Hong, MD; Resident Physician



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My immigrant upbringing has definitely driven me to work hard and take nothing for granted. I feel so lucky that my parents chose to move to the US to give my sisters and I more opportunity for personal/career growth and generation of wealth. This sense of filial duty and utilizing my privilege at times conflicts with my American values of independence. It is difficult to find a sense of belonging in the US. Yet I also don't feel like I belong in Taiwan, where I stick out like a sore thumb with my values and appearance. I've also found it difficult to navigate this space in medicine; I don't connect well with the prototypical (read: White) academicians within medicine but as AAPIs, we are not considered minoritized or under-represented in medicine. I am constantly thinking about my identity as an AAPI person and my role in anti-racism work. I am proud to be AAPI, in all of our diverse cultures and backgrounds!

- Sunny Kung, MD; Resident Physician



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I am a second generation Chinese American and grew up north of Boston. I am grateful to have grown up with a close knit and supportive family, which I attribute to our cultural values. Through my journey into the profession as a nurse, I have fallen into other little “families” along the way. Whether that be teammates, friend groups, colleagues on my unit, or the other healthcare providers that make up an interdisciplinary team for a patient, the common theme throughout has been individuals in support of a common goal.

My upbringing is most evident in my approach to patient care. I try to support patients as I would a family member. I realize for some, that means just an additional support figure. For others, I may part of their only support system, one of their healthcare providers. To be a part of their recovery process, particularly during a vulnerable time, gives me a thankfulness and honor and reinforces the values I had the fortune to grow up with.

- Carena Wong, RN



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As a child I was told by my parents that to be successful in America we had to assimilate. There are so many parts of my AAPI heritage that are wonderful (mostly related to food), but there are also some pretty backwards ideas (in my opinion) particularly around gender and race. It's hard feeling like you've worked your entire life to assimilate into a society that will still "other" you, that will still murder or assault people who look like you. What do you do when somewhere that's supposed to be your home rejects and shames you?

Cathy Wang, MD; Resident Physician



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While my current work focuses on global health inequity, my focus on social injustice was born out of my personal experiences facing racism and its inequities. Understanding the racial injustices as an AAPI has allowed me to better recognize racial and other injustices both at home and abroad. I do consider my global health work in low-income countries to be very much fighting the structures of global racism.

- Paul H. Park, MD, MSc; Director of
Implementation for NCD Synergies at
Partners In Health



My parents emigrated from Mumbai to the U.S. in the 1960s. I was raised with teachings and values from my parents that were rooted in their Indian-Hindu heritage. This provided a loving and strong foundation for me and my brother. Nonetheless, we embraced the American journey, with my childhood enriched by both Indian and non-Indian friends and a wide range of activities such as cub scouts, ice hockey, and baseball. My father was a physician in nuclear medicine and my mother worked in cancer research. They served as the most important roles models to shape my hopeful journey.

- Rohit Bakshi, MD, MA; Jack, Sadie & David
Breakstone Professor of Neurology & Radiology

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Living in Indonesia and growing up as a first generation Asian American has taught me to be flexible, to be inquisitive, and to be kind. Most importantly, it has demonstrated to me how if you see someone that looks like you in a career path down the line that interests you, it is extraordinarily motivating. Thus, I look for opportunities to mentor and tutor Indian American college students who are interested in medicine or the business side of healthcare.

- Serena Desani, MD; Resident Physician



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When I was in medical school, I took a gap year in China to study factors that predicted HIV disease progression. It was seeing the desperation of the HIV patients who I helped care for that inspired me to dedicate my career to fighting infectious diseases and to tackle the HIV pandemic. In early 2020, I began hearing from relatives and friends in China of a different, more terrifying pandemic spreading rapidly through the country. Those stories and the arrival of COVID-19 on our shores spurred me to help lead biobanking efforts at the Brigham and through the MassCPR so that patient samples could be rapidly distributed to investigators across the Brigham/Boston research community. We also urgent retooled our laboratory for COVID-19 sample processing and turned our virology expertise towards this new pathogen. Our studies have provided insight on how SARS-CoV-2 spreads systemically from the lungs and mechanisms that may have led to the emergence of novel variants.

- Jonathan Li, MD; Associate Professor of Medicine, Division of Infectious Diseases