



Prescribe it Forward - Paving a Path Towards Mentorship for All

by Mitchell Gray



Aaron Gilani

Inspired by his own unique path into the field of medicine, Aaron Gilani developed and lead a team of students to start Prescribe it Forward. This innovative platform connects current premedical students from across the country to mentors willing to provide support to these future medical students. After completing his business degree while studying and applying to medical school, Gilani looked to apply his background in business to this nonprofit organization dedicated to mentorship in the medical field.

Now a current fourth-year medical student at Indiana University, Gilani is pushing the limits in student-led mentorship and has connected over 2,100 premedical students with respective mentors.

The inception of Prescribe it Forward came to Gilani one evening while he was in the middle of studying for his USMLE Step 1 exam. "I wanted to think about something else other than my test. It was a great time for reflection, and I was able to sit down and think about what the first two years of medical school meant to me."

From these introspective moments, Gilani set out to answer one important question: "What are ways that I can help aspiring physicians gain access to the people and resources so they too, can one day become medical students."

But for many students, the journey to medical school is complicated by a lack of clear and relatable mentorship. Students who are underrepresented, have non-traditional backgrounds, those with financial difficulties or without access to advisors were exactly the students Gilani and his team were targeting. When Gilani first entered medical school, "[he] assumed that everyone had this journey of 'figuring it out.'" As a first-generation medical student, he sympathized with the challenges that other students faced as they worked to gain admittance to medical school.

"Of course, there are students who come from a lineage of medicine. But it's a lot harder to navigate this process when you don't know anyone in medicine. I was thinking, there are

probably a lot of students who need this help. Where do they go to get it? And I couldn't come up with a clear answer for that."

In the beginning, Gilani was working to define the role that Prescribe it Forward would play in student mentorship. "I think early on, it was setting the vision. What is Prescribe it Forward and what isn't Prescribe it Forward... At the end of the day our goal is to create an environment where any student who wants to be a physician is someone we can help... I think it was important to have that focus because we could lose sight of that mission."

As the organization expanded, Gilani found himself adapting to new expectations. "Now that the vision is set, my goal is to ensure that we deliver on that vision and less so on the day-to-day tasks." When asked to discuss his methods of leading such an incredible group of students to achieve their goals, Gilani added, "I am a very 'lead from the front' type of person. I think to have other people feel like they are stakeholders in what you are doing, you have to show an equal effort and commitment to the task at hand. Once this project got really big, I had to learn that I am only one person. We are all medical students at the end of the day, and we will have to be a part of a team forever. So, you have to learn to trust your teammates and use their own strengths."

Surrounded by a team comprised of his peers, Gilani was able to create an environment where his teammates could dedicate themselves to one component of the organization. "Eric Galante, who graduated from IUSM this year, heads the Mentor Relations Committee. He was the one who spearheaded the idea for Mentor Representatives, which consists of 2-3 mentors at the medical schools with the most mentors. He created a pipeline to further recruit incoming students to our organization and answer any questions for the existing students. That was Eric's big project and I think he did an awesome job."

While Prescribe it Forward continues to make connections amongst students across the country, the team members still haven't lost track of the value of personalized mentorship. "We have all done mentoring before this, and even after starting this program, I still take on mentees because it's the core of what I do. We are 13 months (into the process) and have around 1,500 mentors across 150 medical schools around the country. We would love to have you as a part of our team. Any students interested in getting involved with mentorship or Prescribe it Forward can visit prescribeitforward.com."