

MedStaff Update

ISSUE 09 August 7, 2020

MEDSTAFF SPOTLIGHT

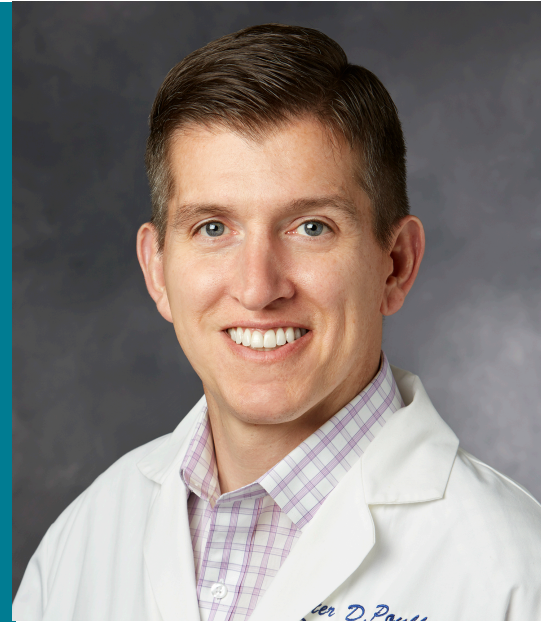
Dr. Peter Poulos

Clinical Associate Professor, Radiology

Clinical Associate Professor, Medicine – Gastroenterology & Hepatology

Founder and Executive Director, Stanford Medicine Abilities Coalition

School of Medicine Diversity Cabinet



Dr. Peter Poulos has led Stanford Medicine to celebrate health care providers with disabilities and the unique perspectives they bring to patient care, teaching and research. He is the founder and executive director of the Stanford Medicine Abilities Coalition (SMAC), serves on the Stanford Medicine Faculty Senate and the School of Medicine Diversity Cabinet and is a faculty advisor to the Medical Students with Disability and Chronic Illness group. Dr. Poulos and his SMAC colleagues recently hosted Stanford's first annual conference for disability in healthcare and are leading the charge in driving health equity for patients and providers with disabilities. In honor of the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, we caught up with Dr. Poulos to learn more about SMAC's ambitious plans for FY21.

You've challenged Stanford Medicine to move from being disability tolerant to celebrating providers with disabilities as part of the diverse fabric of our community. Can you tell us more about this work?

My experience as a physician with a spinal cord injury has taught me that disability is a trait to be sought after in health care as opposed to something to just be accommodated. Each of us brings a

unique viewpoint to our medical practice based on our life experiences – be it with race, ethnicity, religious practice, health or ability. We have the opportunity to move from thinking about how we can be disability tolerant to truly celebrating disability as a diverse and invaluable viewpoint when caring for patients and training the next generation of physicians.

In June you co-hosted Stanford's first annual conference for disability in healthcare that received national interest. What did you learn from this experience?

We were committed to making the conference free and accessible to all and were overwhelmed by the positive response. We had more than 1200 participants including health science students, disability advocates and service providers, and practicing physicians from around the world and have received countless messages of thanks. It has been gratifying to hear from people who have said they felt totally alone before the conference but left with a sense of hope and optimism. After my spinal cord injury, I was fortunate to have the support of a great team at Santa Clara Valley hospital. They invited Dr. Doug Ota, who also had a spinal cord injury in medical school and is the Chief of the Spinal Cord Injury Center at the VA to meet with me while I was in the hospital. Having Dr. Ota's guidance was invaluable, and I want to provide that same support to other colleagues.

We're now spring boarding from the conference with tremendous momentum. We're working with colleagues at Johns Hopkins and the University of Michigan on plans to form a consortium of academic medical centers to conduct research on healthcare providers with disabilities. We're also working to form an organization for physicians with disabilities in Northern California that will focus on community building and advocacy.

What's next for SMAC?

Since our launch in 2018 we've focused on building a sustainable organization to serve all of Stanford Medicine. Unfortunately there is a wide variability in how people with disabilities are treated, even at Stanford. Hosting the June conference was a significant milestone in sharing resources, providing education, and building community connections. We're now working to establish a patient and family advisory council for patients with disabilities that will pair patients and families with SHC staff. We're also hoping to establish a Stanford Medicine Disability Center that will serve all Stanford Medicine patients and staff with disabilities, coordinate accessibility on campus, and do research on the intersection of disability and healthcare, and health equity for patients with disabilities. Our vision is for SMAC to be an advocacy group run out of this center.

In recognition of National Disability Awareness Month in October we have planned a Town Hall with Dean Lloyd Minor and leaders from across Stanford Medicine. We are also planning to launch a disability survey to get a better sense for how many people identify as having a disability and the

barriers and supports for persons with disabilities. To join SMAC or request more information, email Stanfordmedac@stanford.edu.

What are you most proud of?

I'm proud that I've been able to bring people together. There's now a strong community for people with disabilities at Stanford medicine where there wasn't one before. When I hear stories about people being treated unfairly it makes me more determined than ever to work to decrease the stigma health care providers with disabilities face. At SMAC we're working to make Stanford medicine not just disability tolerant but a place where disability is celebrated as an important part of our diverse community.

Why do you love working at Stanford Medicine?

It truly is the people. I came here to start my residency in radiology in 2004 after already doing my residency and part of fellowship at UCSF. I interviewed at many medical centers but felt tremendous support at Stanford from the beginning. The attitude here has always been one of confidence in my abilities and flexibility to figure out a path forward.

I've been fortunate to work with outstanding colleagues in radiology and body imaging and have the support of amazing mentors and leaders like my division chief, Dr. Brooke Jeffrey, who I am constantly learning from. I also love teaching medical students, residents and fellows and the constant flow of learning within such a nurturing and collegial environment. I love it at Stanford and hope to stay here for the rest of my career.