

Chapter Member Spotlight



Name: Sarah Gustafson, M. D., F.A.A.P.

Practice location: Harbor-UCLA Pediatrics

Number of years in practice: 4

Dr. Sarah Gustafson is a pediatric hospitalist in the Department of Pediatrics at Harbor-UCLA and is an Assistant Clinical Professor at David Geffen School of Medicine (DGSOM) at UCLA and at Charles Drew University College of Medicine and Science. She has completed the two-year medical education fellowship at

UCLA and is currently in an AAP national program for clinical teaching, Advancing Pediatric Educator Excellence. She has participated in the curriculum design at DGSOM and is one of the faculty in the new curriculum for first-year medical students. She is devoted to teaching residents at Harbor-UCLA in the inpatient wards and nursery and serves as a mentor and advisor. She is a preceptor to second- and third-year medical students, leads the inpatient fourth-year clerkship at Harbor-UCLA Pediatrics, is a pediatric simulation instructor for all years of medical students, is a neonatal resuscitation program instructor, and serves as a longitudinal mentor in the Global Health Pathway at UCLA. She co-founded and co-directs the Harbor-UCLA Pediatrics Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee and is a representative on the institutional committee. She is actively involved in the Association of Pediatric Program Directors, particularly in curriculum development and in anti-racism efforts. She also serves in the Language Services Department at Harbor-UCLA and at the Department of Health Services. Her interests include all aspects of medical education and mentoring, particularly where it intersects with Language Justice; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Pediatric Hospital Medicine; Quality Improvement; Global Health; and Curriculum Development. She is originally from Fresno, California. She lives in West LA with her partner, who is in his child psychiatry fellowship, and their cat.

What do you do before work that sets the tone for your day?

I love making myself coffee in the morning. Attending morning report feels like the real start of my day and sets the tone. I love hearing about the cases that came in overnight and discussing clinical pearls with the residents. It is invigorating to see the residents refine their clinical reasoning and the chief residents develop further as leaders in teaching. It's a fun way to get to know the residents and students better.

What are some challenges or struggles that you face at work?

It's challenging to say no to new commitments at work. I wish there were more hours in the day

so that I wouldn't be limited with commitments that overlap. Since the start of the pandemic, there have been more virtual meetings that creep into my day and the temptation to do two (or four) things at once is strong.

How do you work through or overcome your challenges or struggles?

I try to maximize my efficiency, and I map out my tasks for the day as much as possible. I set an overarching goal and an intention for each week, which I can come back to when I feel off track. When I'm with patients, I focus on them and the residents and students who care for them with me. When I'm with my students in the classroom, I try to give them my undivided attention. I'm starting to say no to last-minute requests that overlap with other commitments, but it's something I'm still navigating.

After work, what do you do for your own wellness?

I've been getting outdoors and hiking a lot more lately. It has always been something that recentered me, but I previously felt like I needed to drive far away to get a good hike. It took me almost 15 years of living in LA to realize that even though the Santa Monica Mountains don't look like the High Sierras that I grew up with, they still provide a getaway to nature. It's about 15 minutes from where I live in Sawtelle to some of the trails, and I go at least once a week now. If I'm at UCLA, I'll try to walk through the botanical gardens. My other passion is baking; I bake about once a week and bring treats to work to share.

From what/whom does your inspiration or motivation stem?

On a daily basis, my inspiration stems from my grandmother and my trainees: students and residents. My grandmother believes deeply in finding purpose in serving humanity. She speaks kindness and greatness into others. My students' perspectives are grounding, and I find meaning in each interaction where they are learning to be compassionate physicians. It's impossible not to remember why I do what I do when I am surrounded by residents and students on their career journey, filled with curiosity and awe at the human body and spirit but often healthy skepticism for some traditions in medicine.

Wellness Tip: What is the one thing you would recommend to our readership to do each day to take care of oneself?

For those who feel the same peace with being outdoors, go somewhere where you can feel alone in nature for a moment at least once a week – whether that's the beach in the early morning when it's not crowded, a hiking trail in the Santa Monica Mountains on a weekday, or taking advantage of your local park or garden at an odd hour.

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