

Dr. Simmons, who continues to mentor minority pre-adolescent males in the art and science of medicine states the purpose of the Journey to Medicine program is to cultivate more Black male physicians from individuals who grew up here and love this community and would want to stay and live in Western Pennsylvania. “Our goal is to raise up champions to address the desperate need produced by disparities in maternal health as well as other aspects of the care of minorities in Pennsylvania.” The hope for the program is that some students choose to enter the field of medicine and the allied health professions. Regardless of the career track the students in the program choose to follow, the program helps to enforce the early importance of achievement in mathematics and science.

The first cohort of males in the Journey to Medicine program graduated high school in 2016. Although many of these individuals went on to college and successfully graduated in 2020, one went on to pursue a career in medicine. Odell Minniefield is in his second semester of medical school at University of Pittsburgh. He was one of hundreds interviewed for the Journey to Medicine program and one of fifteen to be selected. A first-generation college student, he graduated Taylor Alderdice High School in 2016 and Tuskegee University in May of 2020. Odell’s interest in medicine became apparent to him after viewing the movie, “I am Legend” where Will Smith finds a cure for turning zombies back into human beings. Odell realized that with hard work and scientific knowledge, he could make a difference in someone’s life. Odell also recognizes the need for more African American physicians who are culturally similar to their patients in order for the patient to establish a better trusting relationship with their doctor.

With strong support from his parents, Odell entered the Journey to Medicine program and has enjoyed the opportunities to work in the WISER Simulation Center located on Pitt’s campus, observing actual surgeries, and performing research under the guidance of Dr. MaCalus Hogan, assistant professor in the Department of Orthopedic Surgery and Bioengineering. Odell still stays in close contact with Dr. Simmons, talking to him once or twice a month and texting him once a week. In addition, Odell has acquired lifelong friends through the Journey to Medicine program, staying in touch with his cohort almost every day via group chat, helping each other to push harder and do better. Being in the first class to graduate from the Journey to Medicine program, Odell has the opportunity to mentor those who have come after him and the satisfaction of knowing that he can make their experiences better.

Odell has found entering medical school in the middle of a pandemic somewhat hard. He has found that Zoom fatigue is real, having to sit through virtual classes all day, not being particularly tech savvy himself. Without personal contact, he has found it hard to form groups to study with. However, he now has one semester under his belt and is on his way to his aspiration of becoming an Anesthesiologist or Orthopedic Surgeon with a concentration in sports medicine. We wish him well in his academic pursuits.