

Implementing a Student-Led Dermatology Trainee Advocacy Day in Kentucky

Alicia Fields.¹ 

The Experience

With the core curricula of medical schools focused on the foundational sciences and with enormous pressure on students to successfully navigate standardized exams, topics such as health care policy and advocacy may not be sufficiently explored during physician training.¹ Meanwhile, many patients continue to suffer tremendous health inequities.² Kentucky has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the nation among many other stark health disparities.³ At the University of Kentucky College of Medicine (UKCOM), students designed a trainee-developed social outreach event to bridge this awareness gap through a highly accessible virtual statewide conference. In addition to providing a platform for dermatologists and medical trainees, the event introduced participants to relevant themes and rising concerns in the field. This initiative illustrates how I transformed an idea into action.

The first Dermatology Trainee Advocacy Day was held in Massachusetts in 2021 led by Dr. Avery LaChance, Director of Health Policy and Advocacy at Brigham and Women's Hospital. Like Kentucky in 2024, additional states have joined each year. I first learned about this event through the Dermatology Interest Group Association's Instagram page, where an advertisement for a 2023 event in another state was posted. I attended, and Dr. LaChance was one of the speakers. A quote that she had in her presentation stuck with me. "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." I reached out to Dr. LaChance to see if Kentucky had ever planned an advocacy day and, if not, how I could assist in making this happen. Several months went by before I received an email from a dermatology resident on the national planning team. We set up a time to talk and she told me how excited she was for me to be the chair of the planning committee for Kentucky's first event. It was at that moment I realized that I had a lot of work to do.

I started by working with campus leadership and building a small team of medical students from the various UKCOM campuses who were interested in advocacy, the field of dermatology, or both. Early planning involved forming partnerships with the

Kentucky Dermatological Association (KDA), Kentucky Medical Association (KMA), and determining advocacy topics. Working with a faculty mentor, we decided to include the following topics: Advocacy 101, Advocacy in Dermatology, Legislative Update, Sunscreen Laws in Schools, Tanning Restrictions for Minors, and Insurance Coverage for Skin Cancer Screenings. I then started reaching out to experts in the field to see if they would be willing to speak at our inaugural event. I coordinated conference logistics, created a website for registration and speaker information, and served as the event's host. In the pilot year

Figure 1. Proclamation from Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear Recognizing June 16, 2025, as Dermatology Trainee Advocacy Day.



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Figure 2. Medical Students Teaching Elementary Students about Sun Safety and Skin Cancer Prevention.



approximately 40 dermatologists and medical trainees registered for the event including students from all three medical schools in Kentucky. Participants came together to explore specific policy issues including prior authorizations delaying care and often leading to treatment abandonment,⁴ Kentucky not having legislation regarding sunscreen use in schools,⁵ and Kentucky Revised Statutes Chapter 217.922 allowing children under age 14 to indoor tan when accompanied by a parent/guardian while ages 14-18 can indoor tan with written consent from a parent/guardian.⁶ Following the conference, I was invited to speak at the KDA Annual Meeting, where I provided an overview and highlighted the advocacy efforts of medical students in Kentucky.

For the 2025 event, a second-year student stepped into the chair role, leading our focus on rural dermatology and the healthcare disparities affecting these underserved communities. Our speakers included a UKCOM graduate who is currently completing his dermatology residency at a rural program, representatives from the Melanoma Research Foundation and Improving Melanoma Prevention through Awareness, Care and Teaching (IMPACT Melanoma), and an advocacy overview from the KMA. Following a lively discussion, students are in the early

stages of introducing legislation into the 2026 legislative session to address the issue of sunscreen use in schools. A student-authored resolution, "Sun-safe Behavior in School-aged Children" was recently submitted to the KMA, with the Board of Trustees recommending its adoption. Of special note, Governor Andy Beshear issued an official proclamation recognizing June 16, 2025, as Dermatology Trainee Advocacy Day, honoring the dedication of medical trainees to improve health care access, advance skin cancer prevention, and shape policy that affects dermatologic care across the state ([Figure 1](#)).

Events such as this one not only expose medical students to the challenges that may await them in a desired specialty but also show that there are ways to bring about positive change. This also served as an excellent networking event by connecting like-minded medical students with key stakeholders. UKCOM students continue to advocate for the topics covered during advocacy day and many others by attending the 2024 KMA Physicians' Day at the Capitol, interacting with legislators, and writing resolutions for the KMA. Students are also educating children in Kentucky schools about sun protection and skin cancer prevention ([Figure 2](#)). I believe the work of enthusiastic medical students can promote the adoption of lifelong health habits that have the potential to reduce skin cancer rates.

This event was a collaborative effort involving many people enthusiastic about advocacy and the well-being of Kentuckians. My hope is that it emphasized the importance of advocacy while also starting conversations about issues specific to Kentucky that, in conjunction with the KMA and KDA, we can work to address in the future. Advocacy does not require an advanced degree as anyone can play a role in helping to shape health policy. With support from campus leadership, buy-in from key stakeholders, and a team of passionate medical students, meaningful initiatives can be launched that create lasting impact on both health policy and the next generation of physicians. Using Kentucky's event as a guide and inspiration, student-led advocacy efforts can be developed in other locations or specialties.

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