OBY: From the campus of Harvard Medical School, this is *Think Research,* a podcast devoted to the stories behind clinical research. I'm Oby.

BRENDAN: And I'm Brendan, and we are your hosts. *Think Research* is brought to you by Harvard Catalyst, Harvard University's Clinical and Translational Science Center.

OBY: And by NCATS, the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences.

It takes a lot to make a real change in the public arena. From medicine and health care to politics and advocacy, all facets of our world intersect in some way. To tackle all this takes experience and determination. For Dr. Isaiah Cochrane, his lifelong involvement in science, medicine, education, and social justice has led him to pursue medicine and politics in his first steps towards systematic change.

An alumni of Harvard Catalyst's Summer Clinical and Translational Research program, Dr. Cochrane is a Resident Physician of Family Medicine at Halifax Health in Daytona Beach, Florida.

Hi, Dr. Cochran. Welcome to the show.

ISAIAH COCHRANE: Hi. Thank you for having me. I'm very excited to be on.

OBY: We're excited to have you. How are you doing? Where are you right now?

ISAIAH COCHRANE: I'm great. I actually just moved down to Daytona Beach Florida to spend my family medicine residency at Halifax Health. So enjoying the new area, very close to a lot of things, and also in a very good city to train as a family medicine physician. The program is unopposed, meaning there are no other residents at the hospital. The hospital is almost a 700 bed hospital, so it's a big hospital.

And Daytona and the surrounding area is very diverse in terms of race as well as in terms of socioeconomic status. So I'll get to see a wide spectrum of patients, which will be good for my training. So I'm excited.

OBY: That is great to hear. And how are you holding up during this time?

ISAIAH COCHRANE: Fairly well. Just hoping that everybody else continues to follow guidelines and everything that has been put in place so that way we can prevent too many more people from getting sick. But I'm doing well, and I hope that you all are doing well, also.

OBY: Yes, thank you so much. So in 2014, you participated in Harvard Catalyst's Summer Clinical and Translational Science Research Program. Can you tell us how you found out about the program and what your experience in the program was like?

ISAIAH COCHRANE: Yes. So I found out about the program by way of the internet. I was just looking up summer internships, and that popped up. And I figured I would apply. And thankfully I applied, and I was selected, and it was a very great experience.

OBY: Can you tell us a little bit more about the program and who was recruiting into the program, and a little bit about what you did?

ISAIAH COCHRANE: Yes. So the program was to provide opportunities for those from a wide array of backgrounds. And I was very interested in neurology at the time. So Carol Martin, who now has passed away, was a wonderful individual, and she ran the program for a number of years, I believe. And she did a great job with it.

But anyways, during my interview, I was asked what was my interest, and I said neuroscience. So I was able to select out of three labs that I wanted to be in. I got my number one choice, which was Dr. Charles Nelson III's lab. And I worked under Dr. Candice Larson, who was doing postdoc with him.

Very great experience. I had the opportunity to do research on autism spectrum disorder and how there seemed to be a higher ideological burden for females to obtain the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder versus their male counterparts. So it was a very intriguing experience. I was able to see people doing great work, and that's just inspiring there. So that's number one.

Two, it's always cool to be able to go somewhere and learn from individuals who have had such great experiences all over the world. My PI was a very nice individual and very welcoming to everybody in the lab, even the summer interns. My postdoc, Dr. Candice Larson, was one of the nicest people I've ever met, ever ever. She was from Australia, and I really loved working with her, and just taught me about being methodical and meticulous. Even though I felt like I already was a little bit, it's always great to be pushed even further.

I believe that the Harvard Catalyst program helped to really sharpen things that I was trying to develop, which is very important so then I could take them a step further. So one of the things, again, is that work ethic in making sure that it's OK to be a little slower on some of your projects. But it's about getting it done and getting it done well as opposed to rushing through things.

And that's something that I learned very well working with Dr. Larson, is it's OK to maybe take three days on something even though we said can you finish this in one day, because we want to make sure it's done right, and it's the end result that matters. You can rush good work. You can't rush success. And so I liked her mindset, and I liked working with her.

And that was, I think, very critical to getting through med school. It's not a sprint. So it's OK if you stumble or it's OK if you fall. But it's about it did you finish the marathon? And when you finish the marathon, most people won't even know about that the falls that happen.

And I think that the other thing to add about the Catalyst program is it's just great to be around other individuals who are also learning and going through experiences like you. It's so funny. There was, like, five of us applying to medical school that summer. So of course, we're at Harvard Medical School doing an internship. And all of us were applying.

And we were handling our business in the lab, but then we would also come home and handle the application process to medical school. And we knew that partaking in the Catalyst program would help our medical school application, let's be honest. We knew that we would have something unique from other individuals.

So you know, it's always good to have people around to have positive thoughts, but to also, sometimes, commiserate because it was very difficult applied to medical school during that summer because all of us got there to the program, and one of the first conversations we had was who's applying to medical school this year? Who applied?

One individual, Kia Bird, had already been accepted to Harvard, so she actually did the program. She was already accepted to Harvard, and she was just doing the program beforehand to kind of get acclimated to the area and everything. But yes, the rest of us were waiting on MCAT scores to come in. So as you can imagine, we're all waiting on MCAT scores, and then we're applying. So it was nice to have other individuals around who were going through the same thing you were.

OBY: So now you're in Daytona. You're soon to start, or you are starting your family medicine residency. What made you want to pursue medicine, and when did you know that you wanted to?

ISAIAH COCHRANE: Sure. And before I answer that question, I should also say that when it comes to the program at Harvard, it was also very great because once again, like I said, Carol did a good job placing us in labs, but we also had many sessions where we were able to meet with people throughout the community at Harvard. We had lunch sessions with them. And not only did I have the opportunity to learn from those in my lab, but I also was exposed to a lot of other individuals. So that was a very great opportunity to be exposed to so many different things.

When it comes to medicine, and more specifically, family medicine, I chose medicine because I knew that I wanted to get involved with something that would allow for me to make a change in everybody's lives. And obviously, medicine is one way to do that. I also knew that science was something that I really wanted to get involved with.

So pursuing a PhD was not something I wanted to do. From the very end of high school, I knew that medicine was what I wanted to do. But I knew that medicine wasn't really the final stop for me. And so medicine is a stepping stone for me, I believe, to enter the field of politics. I think that I really believe that it should be somebody in medicine, and people in medicine should be working on health care reform.

And so I know that there are many physicians and other people in the field of health care that are now stepping into this into the realm of politics and policy, and I am really passionate about doing that. I chose my program at Halifax Medical Center for a number of reasons. As I stated, I am in a urban but suburban area, Daytona. Yeah, Daytona Beach area-- Dayton itself is not a huge city, but the surrounding area is approximately 205,000, 210,000 people.

And Daytona Beach itself has a very urban community like you would find in a bigger city. So you do have your under served population. And then in the surrounding areas, you have your more suburban. So again, it will allow for me to see a lot of different things, but it will also allow for me to work with patients who I spent the last year advocating for so much on the Hill in regards to policy. So I'm really going to see these patients again face to face.

I had the opportunity to do so when I went to med school in Dayton, Ohio. But now here in Daytona Beach as a resident, I'll really garner a lot of experience that I think will not only help me become a very strong physician, but will also help me become a more understanding person who is going to run for office because I will have worked with these patients. I will have seen the social determinants of health. And I think that this program will set me up very great for that.

OBY: Great. That's amazing. So we talked through a number of different things. We talked about what your focus was in the SCRPT program and going through medical school, and what you're working towards and looking forward to, even talking about policy and how practicing and your medical degree are going to heavily influence what you're going to be doing on the political side of things. Could you tell us more about some of the other social causes you've been involved with?

ISAIAH COCHRANE: Yes. So I have been involved-- so AMSA is a big thing. The work I've done in AMSA outside of medical school really took up a lot of the work that I was doing. But more specifically, I was involved with the Lower Drug Prices Now campaign through AMSA. So advocating for affordable medicines, along with many other organizations, been a part of advocating for health care for all.

And more specifically right now, it has been Medicare for all. But I will say that I believe that there are multiple ways to achieve things. So that has been something that I've been working on in terms of not only is it important for us to understand that getting to health care for all is a stepwise process, but also the way to do it might not be the way that everybody else feels is the way to do it. And compromise is one thing that needs to happen.

I spent a good amount of time working on gun safety and helping to advocate for research funding to be allocated to the NIH and CDC. And this past December, that actually happened. $12.5 million was allocated to the CDC and $12.5 million was allocated to the NIH. And this was the first time in over 21 years since the Dickey Amendment that we had research for gun violence.

And obviously, gun violence is directly related to health care because we, as health care professionals, are seeing these patients who are afflicted by gun violence, whether it's physical or whether it's mental, because we have to think about the mental ramifications of being involved in a gun violence incident.

I did work at my medical school with refugees due to our organization I helped to start, The Refugee Student Alliance. And that kind of also falls into the AMSA-like activities that I have done, but it was a separate entity. And I also spent some time in Peru about a month after my first year of med school working with the population down there in Iquitos and on the Amazon River. I really spent three weeks with them, and then the other week was just taking some fun time in Peru. But the first three weeks was going to Iquitos and helping to aid the physicians and health care teams down there in Iquitos and along the Amazon River basin.

So I've had a lot of wonderful experiences in terms of being able to help folks. But I don't think I've done enough. I think it's been nice to get this experience and see. But when I finish residency, and I'm an attending physician and a board certified family med physician, I know that-- just because clinically speaking, I'll be able to see patients on my own totally, totally-- it'll be a lot easier. But I also know that because of that, it'll also helped me get involved with things to have more of an effect as well.

OBY: Great. And you talked about AMSA, American Medical Student Association, correct?

ISAIAH COCHRANE: Yes.

OBY: And you are now the president of that group or association?

ISAIAH COCHRANE: So now I am the immediate past president. My term was May 1 of 2019 to April 30 of 2020. It was a full-time position. So I graduated med school May 2019, and I served full time in Washington, DC and finished my term. And as I said, now I'm down in Daytona Beach. So I'm immediate past president, so I'm still on the Board of Trustees. I'm just no longer in the president role.

OBY: Great. And you talked about some of this-- and even through the work you've been doing, I'm sure they were very critical, quite a few of the initiatives you took on and the different things that you did. And can you just hone in on why it was important to be part of that group and leading that association?

ISAIAH COCHRANE: Yeah, it's important just mainly because we need to educate future physicians on not only things that we don't necessarily learn in the classroom, such as social determinants of health and health disparities. That is so important. But also, we need to empower not just future physicians, but all individuals in our society to understand that we can use our voice to make a change. We do have that right as American citizens. It is a right that we have been given, and we should all use it.

But as physicians, we should really be using that because we get to see so many of the constituents that our representatives that are in their districts. And so we have a lot of input and a big place in society. And I think that we should start speaking up. And I know people don't always want to get political, but it is time, I believe, to step into that arena.

OBY: Right. And one of your goals, as you've mentioned, besides becoming a physician and now practicing, is running for elected office. Why do you think it's important to get involved in politics? You've talked about some of it. And what do you hope to achieve?

ISAIAH COCHRANE: Yes. So it's important because we need to make change, and that change is not happening. It's just not happening. There's no other way to put it. I'm not going to get political on this because I don't want to do that. I'm not here to share my beliefs in terms of politics. But we do need to make a change.

I mean, I went to med school. I'm going to go to residency and go through residency. And as I said, people in the health care field have a lot more insight into the field of medicine than anybody else because that's where we work. So I believe that that just needs to happen, especially as a family medicine physician. We work with so many different types of individuals because as a family med doc, we see so many patients. So we are exposed to people from every branch of society.

As a doctor, you're also partly a business person because you do have to handle that as well. So that is a direct part of our work as physicians as well. And then also, the fact that we have gone through medical school, education is another thing. And let's be clear. Health care and education, if all of those were equal for everybody, the world would be very different.

So those are two areas where I feel like not just personally I have a lot of experience, but where I've done a decent amount of work on. So I think that being a physician puts me in a unique opportunity to be able to understand and help folks who have who might not have access to those things.

And I grew up in a single parent household. By no means was I-- by no means-- and I make sure that I put this out here because at times, I feel like when I say that, people are like, oh, it must have been hard growing up. And I was like, no, my mother was a teacher. I had a good family network. I had a lot of opportunities that many people did not have. So I'm not going to say that.

But growing up in a single parent household, I did see some of the difficulties that can occur for other individuals that were close to me. And so I understand the importance of making sure that everybody is given equal access to education.

OBY: Thank you so much for joining us, Dr. Cochrane. It's been a pleasure to have this conversation with you.

ISAIAH COCHRANE: Thank you so much. And I'm always so grateful for opportunities I've had in the past, and being a part of the Harvard Catalyst program was an opportunity that I will never forget. I still have many great friends from the Harvard Catalyst program. I still talk to them regularly. And it was a very great experience, and I am very grateful for having this opportunity to speak to you all today.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

BRENDAN: Thank you for listening. If you've enjoyed this podcast, please rate us on iTunes and help us spread the word about the amazing research taking place across the Harvard community.

OBY: To learn more about the guest on this episode, visit our website extension.Harvard.edu/ThinkResearch.