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GEORGIA OSTEOPATHIC
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
— 1902 —

GOMA News & Updates

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GOMA Leadership Educates PCOM Georgia Students on the Importance of GOMA & Advocacy

Sonbol Shahid-Salles, DO, MPH, Past President of GOMA spent time with the PCOM Georgia medical students on February 25, 2026. In collaboration with the PCOM Georgia Student Council, she discussed the importance of GOMA membership, including advocacy and participation in the Patient-Centered Physicians Coalition of Georgia (PCPC) Day at the Georgia State Capitol. Osteopathic medical students receive free membership to GOMA—the membership form is available online at www.goma.org.

A valuable component of the day included Sean Neal, the AOA's Vice President of Advocacy & Political Affairs, who also discussed the importance of involvement at the AOA level and the need to participate in advocacy programs including action alerts via the Osteopathic Advocacy Network (OAN) at all levels of the profession (from students through training and as an attending physician) and events like DO Day on the Hill. [Here's how to join the OAN](#). Be on the lookout for next year's DO Day on the Hill in Washington, DC, March 24-28, 2027.



Murray Berkowitz, DO is Running for Georgia House of Representatives

Murray R. Berkowitz, DO, MA, MS, MPH, FAOCOPM, FAAO will be on the ballot on November 3, 2026. He is running against the incumbent after being frustrated with his representation. Dr. Berkowitz wrote, “I have a number of concerns, but I was most disappointed that my State Rep (my opponent) voted AGAINST the proposed legislation that would have REDUCED TAXES for us here in Georgia – especially property taxes and modifying homestead provisions that would have REDUCED PROPERTY TAXES.”

Dr. Berkowitz’s main issues that he would like to address are: healthcare, education and safety as well as reducing taxes. He recalls how he got into politics, when he said, “Interestingly, many years ago, my kids said, ‘why don’t you run for Congress?’ I didn’t want to leave home and the family here in Georgia. Flash forward to the present, in mid-February I received a text from the Georgia GOP asking me if I would consider running for the GA State House of Representatives. I responded in the affirmative, and after playing ‘telephone tag’ with Rep Soo Hong (the Vice Chair of the GA House GOP Caucus, was encouraged to submit myself as a candidate. I

am running on the Republican ticket for the GA State House of Representatives (House District 107 in Lawrenceville, GA).”

Dr. Berkowitz received his DO from the College of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery at what is now the Des Moines University Osteopathic Medical Center. He earned the Master of Public Health degree at the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, Maryland. He is residency trained in General Preventive Medicine and Public Health (State of Maryland Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene). Dr. Berkowitz is Board Certified in Neuromusculoskeletal Medicine and Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine, as well as in Preventive Medicine and Public Health, and hold added certification in Occupational Medicine. He earned the Master of Arts and Master of Science degrees from Columbia University, and received my engineering degree at what is now the Tandon School of Engineering of NYU. He also did advanced studies and research at the University of Texas at Arlington and George Mason University. Dr. Berkowitz is a graduate of the 2004-2005 AOA Health Policy Fellowship. He spent two months serving with the Maryland State legislature during the 2005 legislative session. He also currently serves as a Research Fellow at the Osteopathic Research Center in Ft Worth, Texas. Dr. Berkowitz earned Fellowship in the American Osteopathic College of Occupational and Preventive Medicine (FAOCOPM) and also Fellow of the American Academy of Osteopathy (FAAO).

Dr. Berkowitz explains his career path and said, “My career has been varied. I am an engineer turned physician. I was 40 when I applied to medical school. In May, I will have been an osteopathic physician for 30 years, in both private practice and almost 20 years in academic medicine – 15 years right here at the Georgia Campus of PCOM in Suwanee, including over three years as the Associate Dean responsible for all clinical education. Before returning to academic medicine, I was in the private practice of osteopathic medicine as founder and owner of Alpharetta Osteopathic Health LLC. I was a tenured full Professor of Neuromusculoskeletal Medicine and Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine at the Georgia Campus of the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in

Suwanee, GA. Immediately prior to joining PCOM, I had a private osteopathic medicine practice in Arlington, Virginia and Annapolis, Maryland. I served as a Staff Physician at Delaware's Stockley Center for the Developmentally Disabled. Previously, I worked for the Virginia Dept. of Health as Director of a three-county health district. Before that, I worked for the State of Maryland Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene Community Health Administration and was a Visiting Assistant Professor of Computer and Information Sciences at Towson University. Prior to that, I served on active military duty as a Medical Corps Officer in the United States Army. Before attending medical school, I served in numerous assignments in the US Army and US Air Force. I am a disabled veteran and is a medically retired Army Lieutenant Colonel due to service-connected combat-related disabilities. I was a military aviator and parachutist and also hold the Master Space Badge and the Office of the Secretary of Defense Identification Badge. I have thirty military awards and decorations.”

More recent projects were explained by Dr. Berkowitz, “I have been helping new proposed D.O. schools get through the COCA accreditation process. I was specifically brought on board to create the OMM/OPP curricula. During 2025, for six months I had the honor and privilege of serving as the Interim Dean of the Meritus School of Osteopathic Medicine in Hagerstown, Maryland. They received formal pre-accreditation status from COCA, and the first class entered in July 2025. I just finished serving as Associate Dean, Chair, and Professor of OPP at the new D.O. school in Phoenix (The Valley College of Osteopathic Medicine) and helped them achieve formal pre-accreditation status from COCA. They are currently recruiting their inaugural class which will begin in July 2026. I was able to accomplish this working from home here in GA. I am doing healthcare and medical education consulting (Alpharetta Osteopathic Health LLC).”

“I am excited to possibly serve my District, my County, and the State of Georgia,” Dr. Berkowitz said. He is aware that he has an uphill challenge to defeating a multiple term incumbent in a largely Democratic district. He hopes that his osteopathic colleagues can

help by “just mentioning my name and background – to their patients, family, and friends – will help get me known to others. Even if you are not in House District 107, this will potentially help me with name recognition. This will allow people to look deeper.”

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Elmore Alexander, DO Running for Georgia House of Representatives - Prescribing Progress

He would appreciate any help that he can get. His campaign is Murray R. Berkowitz for State House. “Of course, I am able to accept donations made payable to the campaign. Small or large,

everything helps!” Checks in support can be mailed to: “2327 Mahogany Glen Place, Lawrenceville, GA 30043”

Elmore Alexander, DO is also running for the Georgia House of Representatives District 94 seat to represent and address the health, economic, and justice imbalances impacting our communities. “We need more representation. We don’t have primary care representation. We need physicians in elected offices,” said Dr. Alexander.

He was inspired to run for office after testifying for 22 minutes about medical cannabis as the legislators were working SB 220 through committee earlier this session. While he expressed support for the proposed revisions to cannabis potency calculations and the expansion of qualifying medical conditions, he also conveyed concern that legislators did not appear to fully appreciate the challenges that lie ahead. The legislators failed to comprehend the different characteristics in vaping, tinctures and gummies that are swallowed as well as the demands on physicians to be responsible for monitoring patients’ use of medical cannabis when in actuality, the patients are using dispensaries to get their treatment.

Other priorities of Dr. Alexander's platform are; for Georgia to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act rules allowing an increase to access to care for 500,000 Georgians and support rural hospitals; and education issues including tightening up truancy triggering rules as well as re-evaluating how school districts decide how schools will be closed in light of the lower birthrate in society.

Dr. Alexander received his DO from the College of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery at what is now the Des Moines University Medicine and Health Sciences in 1988. He came to Georgia for his internship at Doctors' Hospital on Idlewood Road in Tucker which moved to Northlake Regional Medical Center in the spring of his internship year. Dr. Alexander completed the last two years at the family practice residency of Morehouse. He did a loan repayment service in Palmetto, Georgia. His interest in sports medicine was a major aspect of his early career with him serving as a resident advisor for drug testing for Olympic trials and progressing to becoming the lead physician of Olympic festivals supervising forty doctors and 60 trainers. Dr. Alexander started his own practice in Tucker in 1994 doing primary care, sports medicine and urgent care. He took intermittent work in 1996 as the liaison to the IOC and US Olympic Committee for Drug Control as well as the 1997 Iron Man competition in Hawaii. Later, he worked at the Mental Health Facilities in Milledgeville doing medical care when he found Vitamin D dosing to greatly reduce violent behavior amongst the patients. In 2012, he started a practice focused on aesthetics as well as PRP, O-shots & P-shots.

Dr. Alexander's life changed in 2018 after a bicycle accident in Stone Mountain Park resulted in head trauma and cervical spine damage requiring a 3 level cervical fusion as well as post-traumatic stress disorder. His rehabilitation prevented him from practicing over the next five years. It was only after hyperbaric therapy helping his memory and micro dosing of cannabis did he benefit from the neuroprotective properties of therapy. Since 2023, he has become a specialist in cannabis that guides patients on proper use and also lecturing around the country.

Georgia House of Representatives District 94 seat is currently in a

state of flux. Four candidates ran for the special election to fill the House District 94 seat. And the runoff of the top two vote getters was held April 7th. The seat is vacant after former Rep. Karen Bennett (D) resigned. She is facing federal fraud charges for making false statements on a 2020 application for pandemic unemployment benefits.

Dr. Alexander has qualified to run for the Democratic Primary being held on May 19. At the time of this article being written, it is unclear who the incumbent will be that Dr. Alexander is challenging, but technically, he can say that the incumbent has not done anything for House District 94 since Sine Die (the legislative session's last day) was five days before the runoff election was held. Whomever wins the May 19 Democratic primary will be the representative since there are no Republicans running for this gerrymandered district running diagonally from just north of Snellville and passing southwest to Lithonia (split between Gwinnett and DeKalb counties).

Dr. Alexander would appreciate any donations and promotion that he can get. [Check his website for more information.](#)



New Georgia Legislation: Cannabis changes, Hemp Bill Turns Zombie, Pharmacists Rx'ing BCP & PrEP

Senate Bill 220 and SB 33 are sitting on the Governor's desk. SB 220 if signed, the following seventeen medical conditions qualify for medical cannabis therapy. Patients need to get a Cannabis Card prior to going to a dispensary. Here are those conditions:

(A) Any cancer except skin cancer, unless it is metastatic skin (B) Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, when such disease is diagnosed as severe or end stage; (C) Seizure disorders related to a diagnosis of epilepsy or trauma related head injuries; (D) Multiple sclerosis, when such disease is diagnosed as severe or end stage; (E) Inflammatory bowel disease; (F) Mitochondrial disease; (G) Parkinson's disease; (H) Sickle cell disease; (I) Tourette's syndrome; (J) Autism spectrum disorder, when such disorder is diagnosed for a patient who is at least 18 years of age, or severe autism, when diagnosed for a patient who is less than 18 years of age; (K) Epidermolysis bullosa; (L) Alzheimer's disease; (M) Acquired immune deficiency syndrome, when such disease is diagnosed as Stage III; (N) Peripheral neuropathy, when such symptoms are diagnosed as severe; (O) Post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from direct exposure to or the witnessing of a trauma for a patient who is at least 18 years of age; or (P) Intractable pain; or (Q) Lupus.

The 2026 legislative session featured Georgia lawmakers weighing changes to how people can – and cannot – use ahead of a looming federal restriction on hemp products. The changes come as a federal law is expected to significantly affect the hemp industry across the United States starting in November, when the THC products will be limited to a 0.4mg of a total THC per package – effectively a ban on most hemp products.

Under current Georgia law, medical cannabis products can contain

up to 5% THC concentration, but the proposal awaiting Gov. Brian Kemp's final approval would lift the cap.

Senate Bill 33, sponsored by Kay Kirkpatrick, R-Marietta, would have outlawed synthetic hemp products that are incapable of being naturally produced by marijuana plants. In some late night moves on the last day, SB 33 was emptied out and became a “zombie bill” that had nothing to do with hemp nor cannabis.

It was a dramatic Sine Die in Georgia: a session-ending scramble with lawmakers racing to deliver property tax relief for embattled homeowners before time ran out. When the original vehicle for reform, HB 1116, failed in the Senate, key pieces of the package were folded into SB 33, a bill originally aimed at imposing regulations on consumable hemp products and farming. Among the most meaningful is a homeowner relief grant that should deliver roughly \$500 per taxpayer when Georgians receive their property tax bills this fall. Beyond that, the bill should cap how fast tax assessments can rise and allow local governments and school systems to use an optional 1% local sales tax to fund homestead exemptions and reduce homeowners' property tax bills. That provision, though, would need to win approval from local voters before any local government or school system could use it to offset homeowners' property tax bills.

Other healthcare bills sitting on the Governor's desk awaiting signature are:

HB 1138 would authorize pharmacists to prescribe birth control pills and shots;

SB 195 would authorize pharmacists to prescribe PrEP (HIV prevention);

HB 571 would provide for the licensing and regulation of radiology assistants.

And as required by the Georgia Constitution, a budget was passed this session, but it had to wait to happen on the last day. The House and Senate agreed on a \$38.5 billion budget that leaders say is a

compromise. The compromise budget will include \$11.6 million for 500 NOW/COMP waivers, which are Medicaid waivers designed to help people with disabilities access services in their communities and avoid care in a facility that may be far from home. The Senate had proposed about \$21 million for about 1,200 waivers, which is about the number of people on a waitlist with urgent needs. The budget also includes approximately \$48 million in state funds to increase reimbursement rates for providers treating patients on Medicaid across the state. This Medicaid funding includes targeted investments for services like dental care, psychiatric residential treatment, primary care physicians, reimbursement for autism services, air ambulance reimbursement, adult heart and lung transplants, nursing home improvements, nursing home ventilator reimbursement rate and durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics, and hearing aids. It also provides slots for additional providers in the Medicaid program.



Georgia Maternal Health Network Established to Improve Referrals & Patient Access

Here is a request from DPH Commissioner Kathleen Toomey, MD, MPH.

Georgia OB/Gyn Society; Medical Association of Georgia and Georgia Department of Public Health are pleased to announce the Georgia Maternal Health Network. The idea for this project began after Dr. Jane Ellis spent hours searching the old-school yellow pages for a cardiologist in South GA who would accept one of her

pregnant patients. The goal was to improve the referral process and patient access to care across the state.

All physicians practicing in Georgia are encouraged to participate in the network. An easy-to-use, HIPAA-compliant app provides access to this network and can be downloaded and accessed on a smartphone, laptop, or desktop computer. A referring provider can enter information about a patient, including name, address (including the distance the patient can travel), medical history, insurance information, and the required medical specialty or subspecialty. Specialty providers engaged with the network will receive a notification that a referral is being requested. The provider can review the information and contact the patient and/or referring provider to schedule an appointment. Medical records from the referring and accepting providers can be transmitted via the network to ensure providers involved in the patient's care have the needed patient information.

Any physician may join the Georgia Maternal Health Referral network by claiming their profile on gmhi.net, completing their information, and then participating in this app-based network's referral, communication, and care coordination tools. [See more information here.](#)



Collaboration Amongst Family Practice Residencies in Georgia to Reduce Maternal Mortality

The Georgia Family Medicine Residency Collaborative (GFMRC), a statewide alliance of all 18 Family Medicine residency programs, including our military programs was initiated by GOMA member Monica Newton, DO. Dr. Newton is the current President of Georgia Academy of Family Practice as well as the Program Director of the Family Medicine Residency at Northeast Georgia.

In response to Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) recently introducing significant new requirements for Family Medicine programs, emphasizing competency-based outcomes, community health and workforce development, GFMRC started work in the fall of 2023 to:

- Develop a statewide learning management system (LMS) with shared curricular modules to decrease “academic burden” along with a virtual resource library for teaching materials.
- Establish communities of practice for faculty, osteopathic faculty, chief residents and program coordinators.
- Align with state health priorities, and begin quality improvement work for maternal mortality reduction.

The GFMRC demonstrated that a fully statewide GME alliance is feasible and impactful. It provided a foundation for statewide curriculum, faculty development and coordinated quality improvement, addressing both educational and population health needs. [Read about this important work.](#)



Georgia Delegation visits Capitol Hill for DO Day

Dhanush Avva, OMS-1 VCOM Auburn (from Peachtree City); Caroline Montini, OMS-1 VCOM Auburn (from Buford); Faiz Syed, OMS-1 UP-KYCOM (from Alpharetta); and Daren Wannamaker, D.O., FACOI, PCOM Georgia (from Braselton) met with representatives from their U.S. Senate and House of Representatives' offices during the 2026 DO Day to advocate for legislation on behalf of the American Osteopathic Association on Thursday March 26, 2026.

(Pictured above left to right: Caroline Montini, OMS-1 VCOM Auburn; Faiz Syed, OMS-2 UP-KYCOM, Dhanush Avva, OMS-1 VCOM Auburn; Daren Wannamaker, D.O., FACOI, PCOM Georgia)

In addition to the offices of Senator Raphael Warnock and Senator Jon Ossoff, the delegation visited the offices of Representative Andrew Clyde (Georgia's 9th congressional district which includes Braselton and Buford), Representative Brian Jack (Georgia's 3rd congressional district which includes Peachtree City), and Representative Barry Loudermilk (Georgia's 11th congressional district which includes Alpharetta).

Student Dr. Montini and Dr. Wannamaker also had the opportunity to meet personally with Representative Rich McCormick, M.D., MBA (Georgia's 7th congressional district which includes Suwannee).

Student Dr. Syed had attended DO Day in 2025 and returned this year. He served as the team lead given his experience, encountering more than one familiar face among the legislative staff.

The delegation thanked those who were already co-sponsors of bills to fund additional residencies (especially in rural hospitals and states with new medical schools) and avert cuts to Medicare physician payment, while encouraging others to support these measures and others.

Staff were also educated about osteopathic principles and practices and the significant number of D.O.s providing care to patients, especially the underserved.



Commencements are just around the corner for the DO Classes of 2026!

PCOM's Commencement season is just around the corner for the Class of 2026. The College will honor its graduates during three Commencement ceremonies: PCOM on April 28, PCOM Georgia on May 6, and PCOM South Georgia on May 8. All ceremonies will be livestreamed on PCOM's YouTube channel, with American Sign Language interpreters available both in person and on the livestream.

PCOM Georgia's ceremony will be held on Wednesday, May 6, from 1-3 p.m. at the Gas South Convention Center in Duluth. The graduation ceremony will celebrate all students who have completed the degree requirements for doctoral and graduate programs in the College of Osteopathic Medicine, the School of Pharmacy, and the School of Health Professions and Sciences. PCOM Georgia will also recognize Richard White, PhD, FAHA, as professor emeritus for his years of contributions to the College. At PCOM Georgia, James D. Polk, DO, MS, will address the Class of 2026 during the Commencement ceremony. He has held prominent leadership roles including dean of medicine at Des Moines University's College of Osteopathic Medicine, chief medical officer at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and chief of space medicine at NASA's Johnson Space Center, with expertise spanning emergency, disaster, and aerospace medicine. He holds multiple board certifications and advanced degrees, and has received numerous national honors for his contributions to medicine, public health, and leadership.

On Friday, May 8, from 1-2:30 p.m., PCOM South Georgia's Commencement ceremony will be held in the John Hunt Auditorium at the University of Georgia Tifton Campus Conference Center. The ceremony will celebrate the achievement of all students who have fulfilled degree requirements across the College of Osteopathic Medicine and the School of Health Professions and Sciences. Kirby O. Smith, DO, will serve as the speaker at PCOM South Georgia's 2026 Commencement Ceremony at the University of Georgia Tifton Campus Conference Center. He is a dedicated family physician and educator who has served as the inaugural program director of the

Georgia South Family Medicine Residency Program, as well as chief of staff and chief of medicine at Colquitt Regional Medical Center, with a career focused on advancing rural healthcare and medical education. Board certified in family medicine, Dr. Smith has been recognized for his humanitarian impact and leadership, mentoring generations of physicians committed to community-centered care.

[More details are available here](#)



Sydney Williams (DO '28) Named Global Scholar of the Year

Sydney Williams, a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine student in the Class of 2028 at PCOM South Georgia, was named Global Scholar of the Year through the Council of Osteopathic Student Government Presidents (COSGP). The award recognizes osteopathic medical students who demonstrate leadership and meaningful engagement in global health initiatives during their training.

For Williams, the recognition reflects years of service experiences that have shaped her path in medicine. “Receiving this award is meaningful to me because global health and service have been a

consistent part of my journey in medicine,” she said.

Williams has traveled to 28 countries, with several trips involving healthcare and community programs. In Ghana, she assisted with malaria testing and wound care in schools. In Kenya, she worked with HIV-positive women through wellness information sessions and initiatives that helped participants develop skills and launch small businesses. In Tanzania, she taught English and science while also working alongside a school physician, an experience that allowed her to observe the relationship between education and health in underserved communities.

Her service also includes work in Costa Rica, where she volunteered at a free residential HIV clinic serving LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness. There, she assisted with basic clinical tasks such as taking vitals and helping with patient intake.

Williams has also participated in global service remotely. Through ENGIN, a nonprofit program that connects volunteers with students in Ukraine, she provided weekly virtual English lessons.

“Across all of these experiences, I’ve gained a deeper appreciation for the social, cultural, and economic factors that influence health outcomes,” she said. “Being recognized by PCOM South Georgia for work that reflects these values is truly an honor.”

As she completes her second year and prepares to enter clinical rotations, Williams said her training at PCOM has emphasized both scientific knowledge and the humanistic aspects of patient care. “PCOM has prepared me well for clinical training by emphasizing both strong foundational science and the humanistic side of medicine,” she noted. “Through leadership roles, research, and service opportunities, I’ve had the chance to develop skills beyond the classroom, such as collaboration, communication, and community engagement that are essential in patient care.”

Williams said the school’s emphasis on health disparities, social determinants of health and global health perspectives has further influenced her approach to medicine. “Those perspectives,

combined with my own volunteer experiences, have helped shape the way I plan to approach patient care and have prepared me to enter clinical rotations with curiosity, empathy and a strong commitment to service,” she added. The experiences that earned Williams the Global Scholar of the Year award are also part of her ongoing motivation for becoming a physician.

[Read more about Student Doctor Williams.](#)



Pathya Kunthy (DO '26) Named Student Researcher of the Year at PCOM South Georgia

“Being a physician is an unwritten commitment to lifelong learning,” shared Pathya Kunthy (DO '26), recently named Student Researcher of the Year (SROY) at PCOM South Georgia.

“Participating in research helps you learn how to evaluate and critique studies in a meaningful way, which ultimately helps you care for your patients.”

With four years of medical school almost behind him and Match Day on the horizon, Student Doctor Kunthy reflects, “Besides from the clinical knowledge and resources, PCOM has provided me with mentorship and supportive friendships. Medicine is long and hard. Having friends to cheer you on and mentors to guide you is invaluable.”

In being recognized as SROY, Kunthy sees this award as a representation of the hard work he’s put in—“all those hours writing papers, analyzing data, and staring at research papers was all worth it at the end.”

“So much of Satan dressed in the livery of Heaven.”

– Henry Holcombe (“H.H.”) Tucker was a distinguished Baptist and Reformed theologian in the deep South during the Civil War era. Born in Warren County, Georgia, in 1819, Tucker was known for his ability to synthesize theology with crucial worldview-related disciplines such as philosophy, contemporary culture, and religious movements of his day. He served as an educator, president of both Mercer University and the University of Georgia, and as the editor of the Christian Index. Tucker was a staunch Calvinist, writing prolifically on the doctrines of grace and related topics, including divine providence and the covenant of grace. His legacy lives on through his theological contributions and influential writings."