During the summer of 2009, I had the opportunity to spend 8 weeks working under the guidance of John Meurer, MD, and more directly with Kari Mattson, a Milwaukee Public Schools project coordinator at Community Advocates. We worked to develop more efficient and effective ways to provide information and facilitate enrollment in BadgerCare Plus for qualified families. This work was done through the use of federally provided information on students’ free and reduced price meal program qualifications, as families qualified for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program are most often qualified for Wisconsin Family Medicaid coverage. By learning the process of using this data for developing potential outreach methods, I gained both a better understanding of the school-based outreach model.

This fellowship experience allowed me to grow not only as a student of medicine, but also as an individual who cares greatly about advocacy for unheard voices. The extent of dedication and passion I encountered working with advocates and experts in the field fueled my enthusiasm to learn more each day as I attended retreats and coordinated meetings. To see community health in action from behind-the-scenes made me realize the complexities and barriers that may be invisible even to a physician.

It was also challenging as I experienced frustrations brought about by the barriers of administration and time limitations due to the school-year dependent nature of this project. I found myself repeatedly wishing that other medical students could have the same experiences to understand and keep in mind the subtle difficulties encountered by low-income populations as they search for access to care.

These experiences also made me ponder the greatly intertwined nature of funding in terms of not only medical care, but also advocacy for the community. During this time of economic downturn and public health changes, it was exciting to learn about the process of health policy reform and understand the logistical reasoning behind each step leading to a better plan of action for the general public, as well as experiencing the new implementation of BadgerCare Core for Childless Adults. I now feel confident in my understanding of Wisconsin Medicaid policies, which was a major personal goal of this fellowship.

It is amazing to reflect on how much I have learned in just 8 weeks. I am more determined than ever to work toward meeting community health needs, especially for pediatric populations, and being involved with public health policy. I am indescribably thankful to the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation for the opportunity.