

Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine
Holocaust and Medicine Program
Overview – Study Trip to Auschwitz

Jason Adam Wasserman, PhD, HEC-C

Program Director and Co-Trip Leader
Associate Professor
Department of Foundational Medical Studies
Department of Pediatrics (secondary)
Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine

Hedy S. Wald, PhD

Academic Consultant and Co-Trip Leader
Clinical Professor of Family Medicine, Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University
Adjunct Faculty, Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine
Faculty, Oakland University School of Nursing Continuing Education
Faculty, Harvard Medical School Pediatrics Leadership Program
Commissioner, Lancet Commission on Medicine and the Holocaust

A component of the Holocaust and Medicine Program at the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine is a Study Trip to Auschwitz which provides an opportunity for medical students to delve into this distinctive and tragic era in the history of medicine and critically reflect on its implications for one's own personal and professional development. The trip, including the experiences, lodging, and meals is donor funded with students responsible for only a nominal fee for trip participation, which waived for those with financial need. This experience includes a pre-trip curriculum, a 7-day trip to Krakow and Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland, and a post-tour workshop on site where students begin preparing their presentations for educational impact upon their return. The pre-trip curriculum includes three modules on 1) Holocaust history, 2) legacy of medicine during Nazism and the Holocaust and its contemporary relevance, and 3) interactive reflective writing and professional identity formation in medical education and practice. Each module includes readings and videos to provide historical background as well as prepare students for the reflective activities they will engage in during the trip. The trip includes two days in Krakow with tours of the Jewish Quarter and former Jewish Ghetto, among other sites. In Auschwitz-Birkenau, students participate in guided tours and attend lectures from historians on medicine during the Holocaust. Students also share their reflections about assigned memoirs and biographies of victims (including survivors) at designated tour locations relevant to those narratives. Reflective writing sessions including group discussions are held in the evenings and include sharing insights about how this experience will affect their future careers as physicians and about the contemporary relevance of this history for the medical profession including clinical practice, research, and public policy. Following the trip, students participate in a 7-week seminar where they continue to discuss and reflect upon the trip experience, then shift their focus to developing projects and presentations enabling them to share what they learned with their classmates, the larger university, and the wider community. Presentation venues include a community symposium dinner, a local organization of Jewish physicians, bioethics courses in the medical school and undergraduate program, and grand rounds at the hospital.