

## HealthPack Student Scholarship Award Program

Since March of 1991, the medical device packaging industry's annual education forum – HealthPack – has been attended by hundreds of professionals. Each year, the conference attracts attendees from every corner of the industry, with representations from packaging material suppliers and converters to medical device manufacturers and other supply chain partners.

But the last three conferences were special.

Present among the group of academics, industry experts, and veteran professionals, was one curious student scholarship award winner – eager to learn, network, and grow.

In 2018, the Institute of Packaging Professionals' (IoPP's) Medical Device Packaging Technical Committee (MDPTC) launched the HealthPack Student Scholarship Award Program – an established annual award that sponsors one student to attend HealthPack. MDPTC receives applications from students across the country. After careful deliberation and review, one student is awarded the scholarship, and granted the opportunity to attend the conference. Thanks to HealthPack organizers, the registration cost for the award winner is waived. The expenses associated with travel and accommodation are covered by donations received from individual and corporate supporters of the program.

Each of the three award winners have found their experiences to be extremely valuable.

The first award winner, Suha Sheikh (Award Winner – 2018), recalled how she learned about the scholarship while pursuing her Masters degree in Packaging at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). Prior to attending HealthPack, Suha had interned in the pharmaceutical industry, and had taken numerous packaging courses at RIT, including an elective medical packaging course. She said, "Packaging is a broad industry. I wanted to get a taste of everything that this industry had to offer."



*Suha recently celebrated her 2-year work anniversary in the F&B industry and still maintains an interest in the field of medical packaging.*

The following year, the scholarship was awarded to another one of RIT's packaging students. Sara Cobb (Award Winner – 2019) had a couple of co-op experiences in the medical device and pharmaceutical industries – “I knew that I wanted to be a packaging engineer in the medical industry. Since I was graduating that same semester, networking was very important to me.”



*Sara currently works for Smith and Nephew as an MDR packaging engineer. Her responsibilities include remediation to ensure compliance with current ISO 11607 standards which can include writing technical justifications as well as performing and reporting testing in accordance with ISO standards.*

The most recent award winner, Chris Kelley (Award Winner – 2020), a student at University of Wisconsin-Stout, also had two co-ops in the medical device industry under his belt and was looking forward to expanding his knowledge about sterile barrier packaging – “I was focused on learning from the speakers, and networking with the industry professionals.”



*Chris is currently a senior in the Packaging Program at UW-Stout, graduating in May of 2021. Upon graduation, he looks forward to joining the medical device industry as an Associate R&D Packaging Engineer in the Interventional Urology division at Coloplast.*

Although they were overwhelmed to be in the presence of over three hundred seasoned professionals, they explained how participating in the conference as a student was uniquely advantageous. “It made me uninhibited. I was free to ask questions, to learn, and to engage with others. Everyone was approachable and willing to share their insights with me”, said Suha. Chris also appreciated the affability of all attendees. “When I first arrived at the conference, I was nervous and anxious. But the warm welcome extended by the MDPTC board and the rest of the industry, quickly put me at ease.” Sara agreed – “Everyone was friendly and supportive during my time at the conference.”

The presence of the award recipients does not go unnoticed at HealthPack. The conference schedule features a student spotlight, where the award winner delivers a speech to the audience. The students introduce themselves, give a background about their academic and co-op experiences, describe their goals and ambitions, and express their gratitude to have been given the opportunity to attend. For Sara, the chance to speak at the conference, was not only impactful professionally, but also deeply impactful personally. She confessed that she had a huge fear of public speaking – “Speaking in front of over three hundred industry professionals pushed me out of my comfort zone. The experience helped me grow in ways that I did not anticipate. After giving my speech, I was left with a sense of accomplishment.”

The three-day long conference includes consecutive presentations focused on the challenges, best practices, and innovations surrounding medical packaging. The program also features the Nurses and Technicians Panel, a

signature event organized by MDPTC. The award recipients described this event as one of the highlights of their experience and stated that the live feedback from the end users offered a distinctively important perspective.

Attending the conference as a student left long lasting impressions upon the award recipients. For Chris and Sara, the experience played an important role in shaping their career aspirations. “Being in the presence of other like-minded professionals who were just as passionate about patient safety as I was, reinforced my aspiration to build a career in this industry.” Sara shared a similar account – “The experience reinforced my passion and desire to be in the medical industry. It helped me get where I am in my career today.”

Attending HealthPack enabled Suha to become a well-rounded professional and provided a unique insight into the medical packaging industry that she finds to be beneficial even today. It showed her a glimpse of what the healthcare industry looks like – “It opened up my eyes to how regulated this industry is. Based on my co-op experience, I found similarities and differences between the pharmaceutical and medical device industries. And through my current role in the F&B industry, I continue to find parallels and contrasts. The scientific principles and skills required in the medical industry are very transferrable to the F&B industry, and vice versa.”

Much like the experience itself, the connections made at HealthPack have proven to be long lasting too. The conference provides several opportunities to reconnect with acquaintances and former colleagues, and also to make new connections. Sara recalled that at HealthPack 2019, an RIT alumnus that she knew through her research projects, introduced her to his colleagues. “They are now my coworkers. It’s a small industry”, she says. Suha fondly mentioned her ongoing correspondences with a MDPTC board member, who she first met through the scholarship program. “I feel grateful to have this working relationship present. It is great to have been in touch all this time, and I hope to continue to be connected in the future.”

The HealthPack Student Scholarship Award program has proven to play an important role in engaging students and younger professionals and inspiring them to be actively involved in industry organizations. Sara described how the experience drove her to work on becoming CPP certified and encouraged her to have a professional relationship with IoPP. Similarly, it was at HealthPack, that Chris first learned about MDPTC’s Rookie Outreach Program. Since then, he has continued to be in touch with program leaders and has helped identify ways to keep University students engaged with industry. After graduating in Spring this year (2021), Chris is looking forward to joining the medical packaging industry in a full-time capacity.

Suha recently celebrated her 2-year work anniversary in the F&B industry and still maintains an interest in the field of medical packaging. Sara continues to grow in the medical packaging industry and is also a member of the HealthPack Student Scholarship Award Committee. She is excited to be involved with MDPTC and is delighted to support the program.

The HealthPack Student Scholarship Award Program is only one of the many programs offered by IoPP's MDPTC. MDPTC promotes education, outreach, and collaboration among its 300+ strong membership through 7 different programs. Learn more about MDPTC here - [IoPP MDPTC](#)