

# SARAH SAMS, MD, FAAFP

## AAFP Board of Directors Candidate



Growing up on the family farm in Iowa, it wasn't unusual for Sarah Sams, MD, FAAFP, to leave school mid-day to help her father deliver baby hogs. She was a small town, 'outdoorsy' child with a big family, who had a knack for connecting with everyone she met.

Her affinity for animals led her to study animal science in undergrad with the intention of becoming a veterinarian, but after some advice from mentors, she felt a deep calling to pursue "human medicine" and started to research what life as a physician would be like.

As a medical student at The Ohio State University (OSU) College of Medicine, Dr. Sams was sure she would pursue Obstetrics (OB) and Gynecology (GYN) given her years of experience delivering animals on the farm. However, after a rural family medicine rotation with Roy Bontrager, MD, who showed her the breadth and depth of family medicine, she felt the unique and sacred patient-physician connection that reminded her of home and her small town.

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Once she knew that she could also pursue OB while being a family physician—she knew it was the specialty for her.

Dr. Sams completed residency at the OhioHealth Grant Family Medicine Residency Program in Columbus, OH, where she is now a faculty member and associate director. As a family medicine educator and mentor, she strives to teach residents the importance of connecting with their patients beyond gathering a medical history.

“Sir William Osler, the 'Father of Modern Medicine,' said it best,” explained Dr. Sams. “It is much more important to know what sort of patient has a disease, than what sort of disease a person has.”

Since 2015, Dr. Sams has been a mentor for the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) Foundation Family Medicine Leads Emerging Leader Institute, a year-long program for a select group of student and resident members focused on the development of future family medicine leaders within the specialty. In May, her recent mentee, Ian Thomas, MD, was selected as the Best Project Award recipient.

Seeing her students shine is the ultimate gift for a teacher like Dr. Sams.

As a practicing family physician, Dr. Sams describes herself as very involved, but that is an understatement. Not only does she see patients in the office, but she is often invited to attend their graduations, weddings, sporting events, and even funerals. By sharing these pivotal moments, she shows each of her patients that they are cared for. Many of her families have been cared for across generations, having delivered 12 'grandbabies' for the patients that she delivered early in her practice.

## GET TO KNOW DR. SAMS

### What advice would you give your 13-year old self?

Be serious about what you do, but don't take yourself too seriously. It's okay to sometimes do absolutely nothing at all and just be present with yourself and/or someone else.

### Favorite food?

Chocolate...but if you're talking about "real" food, mashed potatoes and peas.

### Favorite book?

My favorite book is "Horton Hears a Who" because of the quote "A person's a person, no matter how small." But also, you can fill in the blank. A person's a person, no matter how old, young, rich, poor, black, white...A person's a person and we take care of people. From an advocacy standpoint, it also teaches that no matter how many voices are making noise, sometimes it just takes that one extra voice to be heard and be a catalyst for change.

### How do you recharge?

I find peace and joy in kayaking and looking for blue herons. I would rather be outside doing an activity than sitting inside, but if that isn't an option, you'll find me quilting!

### If you could meet any historical figure, who would it be?

Although not a figure of historical reference, I would love to go back in time to talk with a pre-med classmate, Stephanie, who died tragically while we were both at Iowa State University. There are many times I've thought of Stephanie and her memory continues to be an inspiration.

### If you could go anywhere, where would it be?

I want to go to New Zealand. My parents went several times and made connections with people there who I'm still in contact with today.

### What's on your playlist at the moment?

My car radio is set to 80s on 8, but "Break My Stride" by Matthew Wilder is a favorite.

### What is your most prized possession?

It's got to be my mother's butter churn. Growing up I'd turn the handle and watch the fresh cream become butter. Memories include my mother making bread to go along with the homemade butter. There's nothing better.

### What is your biggest accomplishment?

Raising two amazing daughters, Crystal and Grace. What's most important to me is that they are happy, healthy, and find success in whatever they set their hearts to.

Dr. Sams is also a strong advocate for, and champion of, family medicine. Whether it's serving as chair for the Ohio Academy of Family Physicians (OAFP) Public Policy Committee, providing testimony at the Ohio statehouse, or meeting one-on-one with state legislators, she recognizes the risk of harmful legislative and federal interference within the practice of medicine, and actively commits to preserving the patient-physician relationship.

"When we have a collective voice, we can fight for our patients and colleagues so that they may provide and receive the best care possible," said Dr. Sams.

Dr. Sams has been a leader within the AAFP and the OAFP throughout her career. Most notably, she served as OAFP president from 2010-11 and is currently the AAFP delegate on the OAFP Board of Directors. She is also the chair of the AAFP's Commission on Finance and Insurance. Dr. Sams has been inspired by many leaders and colleagues to run for the AAFP Board of Directors and is encouraged by their support.

"Becoming a leader in the AAFP is not a destination, but a journey," she explained. "I did not set out in my career with the thought of running for the AAFP Board of Directors, but as I become more involved in my health system and the AAFP, I found my passion for making the journey better for the next generation."

As a member of the AAFP Board of Directors, Dr. Sams will use her time, talents, connections, and skills to challenge the status quo and lead family physicians to where they ought to be.

"I want our physicians to find joy in practicing medicine again," said Dr. Sams. "With the many challenges brought on by administrative burden and legislation, my hope is that in removing some of these barriers that take joy away, we will not only thrive, but also be able to provide the quality care our patients deserve. So that means that some of us will need to challenge the current system. It won't be easy, but it will be what's necessary for our specialty and patients to succeed."

*To learn more about Dr. Sams and support her campaign, please visit her website at [www.ohioafp.org/sams](http://www.ohioafp.org/sams).*

