CELEBRATING
African American Pioneers in Medicine

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Student National Medical Association/African American Medical Student Association

With Contributions from the Class of 2022 - Present
DOROTHY CELESTE BOULDING FEREBEE
1898 – 1980

First Medical Director of the Mississippi Health Project.

Dr. Boulding Ferebee was an American obstetrician and civil rights activist. She graduated top 5 from Tufts Medical School and later instructed at Howard University while maintaining her own practice. She helped establish the Southeast Neighborhood House, which was an adjunct to the whites-only Friendship House Medical Center in Washington D.C. Dr. Boulding Ferebee was the first medical director of the Mississippi Health Project which was one of the most instrumental public health projects ever in the Jim Crow era south.
Appointed as California's first ever surgeon general in 2019, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris is an American Pediatrician who has dedicated much of her career to serving vulnerable communities and combating the root cause of health disparities. She founded a clinic in one of San Francisco's most underserved communities and in doing so observed patients still facing disproportionate risks for poor health, development, and behavioral outcomes. Through research, she identified the role of Adverse Childhood Experiences in the health of her patients. She founded the Center for Youth Wellness and subsequently grew the organization to be a national leader to advance pediatric medicine and transform the way society responds to children exposed to toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences.
Leonidas Berry was the first African American intern at Cook County Hospital in Chicago, Illinois as well as the first African American physician on staff at Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago, Illinois. He was born in Woodsdale North Carolina to a minister and a schoolteacher. Dr. Berry received his medical degree from Rush Medical College in 1929 and obtained a Master of Science in pathology from the University of Illinois in 1933. In 1935, Dr. Berry completed his residencies in internal medicine and gastroenterology at Cook County Hospital. Eventually, Dr. Berry became a junior attending physician at Chicago’s Provident Hospital, which was the first-black owned hospital in the United States. Not long after, he became the chairman of the Division of Gastroenterology and the chairman for the Department of Medicine at Provident Hospital. It was at Michael Reese Hospital that Dr. Berry faced obstacle after obstacle. Despite teaching gastroenterology at the hospital, being the first black physician on staff, and being one of the most distinguished gastroenterologists in the world, it still took 17 years for him to be deemed “worthy” of the title of senior attending physician at Michael Reese Hospital.
Myra Adele Logan, hailing from Tuskegee, AL, is the first woman to perform open-heart surgery. At the time in 1943, it was the 9th time the surgery was ever performed worldwide. She is also the first African American woman to be elected a fellow of the American College of Surgeons.

In regards to her medical education, she graduated from New York Medical College in 1933 and served her residency at Harlem Hospital, New York afterwards. It was at Harlem Hospital that she would serve as an associate surgeon and perform the open-heart surgery. She was also a visiting surgeon at Sydenham Hospital.

After the open-heart surgery, Dr. Logan also became interested in the research of novel antibiotics such as Aureomycin and published her results in the Archives of Surgery and Journal of American Medical Surgery. In the 1960s, she was involved in research on the early detection and treatment of breast cancer via x-ray processes that more accurately detected differences in breast tissue to better detect tumors.

Dr. Logan was committed to social issues of her time. She was a member of the New York State Committee on Discrimination early in her career up until her resignation in 1944 due to Governor Dewey’s neglect of the anti-discriminatory bill the committee proposed earlier. She was also active in Planned Parenthood and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In regards to her hobbies, she was an accomplished classical pianist.

She was born in 1908 and passed away on January 13, 1977 at the age of 68 due to lung cancer.
NATHAN FRANCIS MOSSELL, M.D.
1856 – 1946

First African American member of the Philadelphia Medical Society.

Born on July 27, 1856, to descendants of free slaves, Dr. Mossell was the first African American graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in 1982, after which he completed his post-graduate training in Philadelphia and London. He was the first African American physician elected as a member of the Philadelphia County Medical Society, and he went on to help found the Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital and Training School in 1895, which he led until his retirement in 1933. Upon retirement, Dr. Mossell continued to work at his private practice until his death on October 27, 1946 at the age of 90. He was believed to be the oldest practicing African American physician at the time of his death.
ALEXANDER AUGUSTA, MD
1825 - 1890

First black physician appointed director of a U.S. hospital.

Alexander Augusta earned his medical degree at Trinity Medical College in Toronto, Canada, and established a successful medical practice in Canada before relocating to the U.S. in 1862. Drafted to serve in the Civil War, Dr. Augusta became the first commissioned black surgeon in the U.S. Army. He later became the first black physician to direct a U.S. hospital — Freedman’s Hospital in Washington D.C. After leaving Freedman’s, Dr. Augusta continued in private practice and became a professor at Howard University Medical Department in Washington D.C.
PATRICIA BATH, MD
1942 - 2019

First black female physician awarded a patent for a medical invention.

Patricia Bath received her medical degree from Howard University College of Medicine in Washington D.C. She interned at Harlem Hospital in New York City from 1968 to 1969 and completed a fellowship in ophthalmology at Columbia University from 1969 to 1970. Dr. Bath’s accomplishments include the invention of a new device and technique for cataract surgery known as laserphaco, for which she was the first black woman to receive a medical patent.

She was the first woman appointed chair of ophthalmology at a U.S. medical institution (UCLA) in 1983. Dr. Bath retired from her post 10 years later and has since become an advocate for telemedicine, serving in roles related to the emerging technology at Howard University and St. George’s University in Grenada.
ROBERT BOYD, MD
1858 - 1912

President and co-founder of the first professional organization for black physicians.

The National Medical Association is the nation’s oldest and largest organization representing black physicians and healthcare professionals. Racial exclusivity and segregation laws at the turn of the 20th century made black physician membership in America’s other professional organizations, such as the American Medical Association, virtually impossible. Black physicians frustrated by professional disenfranchisement created the NMA to serve the black medical community. Robert Boyd, MD, of Nashville, Tenn., was appointed the group’s first president in 1895.
**LONNIE BRISTOW, MD**

1930 - present

*First black physician elected president of the American Medical Association.*

Lonnie Bristow earned his medical degree at New York University and practiced as an internist in San Pablo, Calif., for more than 30 years. Dr. Bristow joined the AMA in 1968 after the organization banned racial discrimination within its ranks and allowed black membership. In 1994, Dr. Bristow became the first black physician to lead the organization. Under his leadership, the organization focused on many of the issues Dr. Bristow dedicated his career to, including sickle cell anemia, coronary care and socioeconomic issues impacting healthcare.
ALEXA CANADY, MD
1950- present

First black female neurosurgeon.

Dr. Canady struggled to secure a neurosurgical internship after earning her medical degree from the University of Michigan Medical School in 1975. But by 1981, Dr. Canady had become America’s first black female neurosurgeon. She completed her residency at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and went on to specialize in pediatric neurosurgery, practicing at a number of respected medical institutions.

In her most notable role, she served as chief of neurosurgery at Detroit-based Children’s Hospital of Michigan from 1987 to 2001. Under her guidance, the department gained national recognition and has consistently been ranked among America’s best pediatric neurosurgery programs in U.S.News & World Report’s Best Children’s Hospitals list.
BEN CARSON, MD
1951 - present

First neurosurgeon to successfully separate conjoined twins attached at the back of the head.

Dr. Carson was one of the youngest physicians to direct pediatric neurosurgery at Baltimore-based Johns Hopkins Hospital. He successfully completed the first surgical separation of conjoined twins attached at the back of the head in 1987.

Dr. Carson was the secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development under President Donald Trump. He earned his bachelor’s degree at Yale University in New Haven, Conn., and his medical degree at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and later completed his residency in neurosurgery at Baltimore-based Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.
DONNA CHRISTIAN-CHRISTENSEN, MD
1945 - present

First female physician elected to Congress.

Representing the U.S. Virgin Islands, Dr. Christian-Christensen is the first female physician to serve as an elected member of Congress. She earned her medical degree from George Washington University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C., in 1970 and completed her residency in family medicine at Howard University Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Christian-Christensen is currently serving her fourth consecutive term in Congress. She served as chair of the Congressional Black Caucus’s Health Braintrust in 1998, an advocacy group that leads efforts to oversee and advocate for minority health issues on national and international platforms.
REBECCA CRUMPLER, MD
1831 - 1895

First black woman awarded a medical degree from a U.S. college.

Rebecca Crumpler graduated from New England Female Medical College in Boston in 1864 as the first black woman awarded a medical degree from a U.S. university. Dr. Crumpler achieved this feat at a time when women, regardless of race, were largely barred from secondary education or higher learning opportunities. She published Book of Medical Discourses in 1883, which drew information from her clinical experiences to help women better care for the health of their families.
HELEN DICKENS, MD
1909 - 2001

First black woman admitted to the American College of Surgeons.

The only black woman in her graduating class, Helen Dickens earned her medical degree from the University of Illinois in Chicago in 1934. She completed her internship at Provident Hospital in Chicago during which she treated patients with tuberculosis in impoverished communities.

In 1945, Dr. Dickens was the first black woman to receive board certification in obstetrics and gynecology. Five years later, she became the first black woman admitted as a fellow of the American College of Surgeons. She served as director of the obstetrics department at Mercy-Douglass Hospital in Collingdale, Pa., for more than 12 years.
CHARLES DREW, MD
1904 - 1950

First to use blood plasma to store blood for transfusion.

Charles Drew pioneered methods of storing blood plasma for transfusion and organized the first large-scale blood bank in the U.S. during WWII. Following the war, Dr. Drew began developing a blood storage program at the American Red Cross but resigned soon after officials decided to segregate the blood of African-Americans. Dr. Drew continued on to become chief surgeon at Freedman’s Hospital in Washington D.C., and the first black examiner for the American Board of Surgery.
Joycelyn Elders, MD

1933 - present

First black female physician appointed surgeon general.

Born to a family of impoverished farmers in 1933, Jocelyn Elders grew up in a rural, segregated pocket of Arkansas. In spite of socioeconomic obstacles, Dr. Elders earned her medical degree from the University of Arkansas Medical School in Little Rock in 1960. She returned to the university for her residency in 1961, after which she became chief resident responsible for a team of all-white, all-male residents and interns.

In 1987, Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton appointed Dr. Elders director of the Aransas Department of Health. As U.S. President, Mr. Clinton appointed Dr. Elders the first black U.S. surgeon general in 1993.
ROSELYN EPPS, MD

1930 - 2014

First black president of the American Medical Women’s Association.

Dr. Epps graduated with honors from Washington, D.C.-based Howard University College of Medicine in 1951. Dr. Epps devoted her life to advocating for women’s health and public health issues in underserved communities and made extraordinary contributions to public health organizations. Her achievements include presiding as the first black president of the American Medical Women’s Association in 1974 and serving as a scientific program administrator at the National Institutes of Health.

In her lifetime, Dr. Epps produced more than 90 articles in peer-reviewed journals and served as co-editor for both The Women’s Complete Healthbook and Developing a Child Care Program.
KENNETH FRAZIER, JD

1954 - present

First black man to lead a major pharmaceutical company.

In 1992, Mr. Frazier joined Merck & Co.’s public affairs division as general counsel, helping to define the pharmaceutical giant’s legal strategy during the next 10 years. He rose through the management ranks at Merck until he was appointed chairman and CEO in 2011, becoming the first black man to lead a major pharmaceutical company. Merck is among the five largest drug companies in the world by annual revenue.

Mr. Frazier received his undergraduate degree from The Pennsylvania State University in University Park and earned his law degree from Cambridge, Mass.-based Harvard Law School.
SOLOMON FULLER, MD

1872 - 1953

First black psychiatrist recognized by the American Psychiatric Association.

Dr. Fuller pioneered Alzheimer’s research during his career and advanced the study of many other neurodegenerative diseases, including schizo-phrenia and manic depression. After earning his medical degree from Boston University School of Medicine in 1897, Dr. Fuller became the first black psychiatrist in the U.S. recognized by the APA.

He eventually became an emeritus professor of neurology at Boston University. The mental health program at the university bears Dr. Fuller’s name today in honor of his contributions to psychiatric research.
Marilyn Gaston, MD

1939 - present

First black female director of an U.S. Public Health Service bureau.

Marilyn Gaston earned her medical degree from the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine in 1964 and completed her internship in pediatric medicine at Philadelphia General Hospital. She is credited for her groundbreaking research in sickle cell anemia. Dr. Gaston was the first black female physician appointed director of HHS’ Bureau of Primary Health Care in 1990, where she focused on improving healthcare access to underserved and minority communities.

National and international organizations have recognized Dr. Gaston for her social and scientific achievements. She received each type of award given by the U.S. Public Health Service as well as the National Medical Association’s most prestigious honor — the NMA Scroll of Merit.
WILLIAM HINTON, MD
1883 - 1959

First Black physician to teach at Harvard Medical School.

Dr. Hinton graduated from Boston-based Harvard Medical School in 1912, after which he worked in Harvard's Wassermann Laboratory. He became the first Black person promoted to the rank of professor at Harvard Medical School in 1949. The appointment came more than 30 years after joining the faculty and only a year before he retired. Dr. Hinton was a world-renowned expert in the diagnosis and treatment of syphilis. He was the first Black person to write a medical textbook in the U.S. Published in 1936, it was called *Syphilis and its Treatment.*
RISA LAVIZZO-MOUREY, MD, MBA
1954 - present

First black female president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Dr. Lavizzo-Mourey has more than 30 years of experience as a medical practitioner, policymaker, professor and nonprofit executive. In 2003, she became the first black female president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, one of America’s largest philanthropic organizations devoted to public health and healthcare. Before joining the foundation, Dr. Lavizzo-Mourey served as a professor of medicine and healthcare systems at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, directed Penn’s Institute on Aging and was chief of geriatric medicine at University of Pennsylvania’s School of Medicine.
MARY MAHONEY, RN

1845 - 1926

First black woman awarded a nursing degree.

Ms. Mahoney is credited as America’s first black professional nurse. She graduated from Boston-based New England Hospital for Women and Children’s training school for nurses in 1879 and became one of the first black members of the American Nurses Association.

In addition to her pioneering efforts in nursing, Ms. Mahoney is recognized for her role in the women’s suffrage movement. She was among the first women to register to vote in Boston following the ratification of the 19th Amendment on August 26, 1920.
James Smith was an American physician, abolitionist and author. He earned his medical degree from the University of Glasgow, Scotland, and returned to the U.S. as the first black man to hold and practice with a medical degree. He was also the first black physician to establish and run a pharmacy. He used his training in medicine and statistics to refute common misconceptions about race, intelligence, medicine and society in general.
DANIEL WILLIAMS, MD
1856 - 1931

One of the first physicians to perform a successful open-heart surgery; founded the first interracial and black-owned hospital.

Dr. Williams opened Provident Hospital in Chicago in 1893, the first black-owned hospital and the first medical facility with an interracial staff. He was one of the first physicians to complete a successful pericardial surgery, also known as open-heart surgery.

He later became chief surgeon at Freedmen’s Hospital in Washington, D.C. Dr. Williams was the first black member of the American College of Surgeons and co-founded the National Medical Association with Robert Boyd, MD. He earned his medical degree from Chicago Medical College.
JANE WRIGHT, MD

1919 - 2013

First woman elected president of the New York Cancer Society.

Jane Wright was a pioneering cancer researcher and accomplished surgeon. Her work is largely responsible for elevating chemotherapy from a last-ditch effort at treating cancer patients to a viable treatment option. She completed her residency at Harlem (N.Y.) Hospital, where she later served as chief resident. In 1964, working as part of a team at New York University School of Medicine, Dr. Wright developed a nonsurgical method using a catheter system to deliver heavy doses of anti-cancer drugs to previously hard-to-reach tumor areas in the kidneys, spleen and elsewhere. Dr. Wright served as associate dean and head of cancer chemotherapy department at New York Medical College in New York City in 1967.