African-American Contributions Series

presented by BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee

Healing Touch

Celebrating the Contributions of Tennessee's African-Americans to Health Care
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease Condition</th>
<th>Prevalence in African-Americans-*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes-</td>
<td>African-Americans are 2 times more likely to have diabetes and 2.5 times more likely to die from it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heart Disease-</td>
<td>Approximately 40 percent of African-American men and women have heart disease and are 29 percent more likely to die from it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cancer-</td>
<td>African-Americans are 23 percent more likely to die from cancer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS-</td>
<td>African-Americans are 10 times more likely to die of AIDS. It is the leading cause of death for African-American women aged 24-35 and the third leading cause of death for African-American men in the same age group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stroke-</td>
<td>African-Americans are 1.5 times more likely to die from stroke.</td>
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</table>

Dear Fellow Tennesseans,

The story about to unfold highlights the achievements of many of the state’s pioneering doctors and medical professionals. This brochure and corresponding video are part of our series of programs celebrating the achievements of African-Americans.

The evolving story of African-American health, though, is even more important.

It’s an unfortunate reality that many minorities are more prone to certain illnesses and disease. African-Americans, in particular, face a greater threat from diabetes, heart disease, asthma and stroke. African-Americans are also often less likely to seek and receive needed treatment. This can change.

BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee and others throughout the state are working to reduce these differences – known as health disparities. You can help.

First, whether you are a minority or not, it’s important to take steps to get healthy and stay healthy. Encourage others to do the same. Learn more about health conditions that affect African-Americans and minorities. Pay attention to warning signs or symptoms of diabetes, heart attack or stroke. Finally, work with your doctor - and your family - to take better care of yourselves and those in your community.

Make changes to improve your health so that the work achieved by African-American doctors and health professionals continues to have a positive, changing impact on our quality of life – and quality of health.

Sincerely,

Ronald Harris
Senior Manager of Diversity
BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee
“Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life, as by the obstacles he has overcome while trying to succeed.”

Booker T. Washington
Introduction
The human spirit is strong. It triumphs and succeeds in spite of the many obstacles it faces in the course of a lifetime. Some of the greatest illustrations of the resilient human spirit are seen in the lives of the first African-Americans to practice medicine in the South.

African-Americans practicing health care in the 1800s faced adversity from many fronts.¹ Held as slaves until 1865, African-Americans had few – if any – civil liberties. Up until that time, it was illegal to teach black people how to read.

After the Civil War, the need for health care services in the African-American community was dire.² Because receiving health care services from the white community was not an option, African-Americans had to look within themselves to gain an education and practice health care.³

Determined men and women set out to test the strength of the human spirit. Head on, they faced the obstacles of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. They persevered, and in the process, they have helped heal divisions within our communities.

Until 1865, it was illegal to teach black people how to read. Just 12 years later, the first African-American physicians graduated from Meharry Medical College.
A Hospital’s Origin
In 1826, an African-American family helped a young white man named Samuel Meharry pull his wagon from a muddy road in the woods of Kentucky. They gave him shelter and food and showed him kindness he never forgot. He left them saying, “I have no money now, but when I can, I shall do something for your race.”

Meharry Medical College was the result of that pledge. It was founded in Nashville in 1876 as the Meharry Medical Department of Central Tennessee College.4

Meharry debuted its first graduates in 1877. Today, it is the nation’s largest, private, independent historically black institution dedicated solely to educating health science professionals. The school admits students of all races, and is a major medical center.5

Early Days of Health Care in the African-American Community

The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 freed all slaves.

While the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 freed all slaves in Confederate states, segregation of blacks and whites remained a part of Southern culture.

In 1896, the Supreme Court upheld the “separate but equal” doctrine in Plessy v. Ferguson that led to the return of institutionalized segregation across the South.6 Opportunities for blacks wishing to pursue medical careers became even more limited, as they were excluded from white hospitals, medical schools and professional medical societies.

This environment of segregation fostered even more innovation. Many young African-American physicians began developing competencies in specialized areas. Some even used their own resources to open hospitals to teach other African-American physicians and to provide medical care to blacks who were denied adequate care by white facilities.

In most parts of the South, black patients at white hospitals were restricted to beds in the black ward, often located in the basement.7 However, black patients at hospitals operated by their own race were treated with respect and concern, even though these facilities were often cramped and not equipped with the most modern equipment.8

Changing Times

In 1954, the Supreme Court declared that racially separate public schools and other racially segregated public facilities were inherently unconstitutional.

In 1954, the Supreme Court decision in Brown v. the Board of Education declared that racially separate public schools, and by extension, other racially segregated public facilities, were inherently unconstitutional.9 African-American physicians – and those seeking health care – finally had access to better facilities and positions in formerly white-only hospitals.

Still, discrimination remained in the South. African-American doctors could not join medical societies or other professional organizations because many groups held their meetings at private facilities that didn’t allow blacks.
The effect of such inequality was that African-Americans practicing health care became even more determined and driven. Those pioneers felt an obligation to their predecessors to set an example of who they could become and what they could achieve.

**A Bright Future**
Countless African-American men and women have made significant contributions toward better health care for all. These contributions have touched and enriched the lives of all Americans.

Today, the future for young, aspiring health care professionals of all races continues to unfold, revealing limitless possibilities.

**Key Figures**

*William Astrapp, M.D.*, was the first African-American physician to practice in South Pittsburg. An entrepreneur, Dr. Astrapp also owned a pharmacy where he made and dispensed medications to his patients.

*Raleigh Bledsoe, M.D.*, was a radiologist who introduced the “fat pad sign” of elbow trauma to the American scientific medical literature.

*Lonnie R. Boaz, Jr., M.D.*, was a specialist in family practice for over 30 years in Chattanooga. He held leadership roles with various medical societies and Chattanooga-area hospitals, and served on the boards of many community organizations.

*Robert Boyd, M.D., D.D.S.*, was the first African-American doctor to earn a living with the full-time practice of medicine and dentistry in Nashville. He opened Nashville’s first hospital for blacks in 1893 and co-founded the National Medical Association in 1895, the first permanent medical association for African-Americans.

*Dorothy Brown, M.D.*, was the first female African-American surgeon to practice in the South in 1954 and the first black woman elected a Fellow in the American College of Surgeons.

*E.P. Crump, M.D.*, a pediatrician and researcher in the area of premature births and mental retardation, was among the first three African-American physicians to be admitted for membership in the Nashville Academy of Medicine and the Tennessee State Medical Association.

*O.L. Davis, M.D., D.D.S.*, was the first black dentist in the South. After graduating from the dental division of Meharry in 1902, she established her first practice in Chattanooga.

*E.V. Davidson, M.D.*, was Knoxville’s first board-certified African-American surgeon who helped integrate University Hospital. Dr. Davidson helped save Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s life after the first assassination attempt in New York City in 1958.

*Lemuel Diggs, M.D.*, a hematologist and researcher who developed the first blood bank in the South in 1938, played a prominent role in the creation of St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital. He founded a comprehensive research center in 1971 dedicated primarily to the study of sickle cell anemia. The center was located at the University of Tennessee at Memphis.

*L.M. Donalson, M.D.*, operated his own hospital, the Lincoln County Colored Hospital, in Fayetteville. The hospital was eventually named L.M. Donalson Hospital.

*Henry M. Green, M.D.*, was a scholar, financier, scientist and recognized authority on nervous diseases. He served as president of the National Medical Association and National Hospital Association.

*John Henry Hale, M.D.*, opened the Millie E. Hale Hospital in 1916 in Nashville. He later became a professor, chief
of staff and chairman of the Department of Surgery at Meharry and chief of surgery at Hubbard Hospital.

Axel C. Hansen, M.D., published the first cases of a rare eye disease to be reported in the U.S. in the American Journal of Ophthalmology. He was medical director of the George W. Hubbard Hospital and a consultant to the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Hansen was among the first three African-American physicians to be admitted membership in the Nashville Academy of Medicine and the Tennessee State Medical Association. He became the first full-time faculty member at Meharry to be certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology.

Walter S. E. Hardy, Jr., M.D., began his medical practice in 1951 in Knoxville, where he was an active medical, political and civic leader. He was one of the first African-Americans to run for city council in 1961.

Carroll Leevy, M.D., a world-renowned liver disease specialist, organized the first known multidisciplinary clinic in the country for alcoholics with liver disease in 1971.

Edgar Lennon, M.D., owned and operated Lennon Hospital in Knoxville, the first private black hospital in East Tennessee with a nurse training school.

William A. Lewis, M.D., began practicing medicine in the early 1900s in Pulaski. He was one of the first African-Americans in the South granted membership in the all-white American Medical Association. During his 64-year medical career, Dr. Lewis delivered over 2,200 babies.

Miles Lynk, M.D., the first African-American physician in Jackson, operated his own hospital. He also founded the University of West Tennessee College of Medicine and Surgery in 1900, which moved to Memphis seven years later. Dr. Lynk published the first black medical journal in the U.S., the Medical and Surgical Observer, and co-founded the National Medical Association in 1895, the first permanent medical association for African-Americans.

Julius Augustus McMillan, M.D., was one of the South’s leading African-American surgeons in the early 20th century. He specialized in abdominal operations and diseases of the genito-urinary tract. He taught obstetrics and gynecology at Meharry and served as medical director of George W. Hubbard Hospital from 1925-1937.

Hiram B. Moore, M.D., established his medical practice in South Pittsburg in 1944. In 1958, he became the first African-American in the state to be appointed to the Housing Authority Board. Six years later, he was the first black admitted to the Chattanooga Hamilton County Medical Society.

J.H. Presnell, M.D., was a practicing physician in Knoxville for over 40 years and was dubbed the “mayor” of the city’s African-American population. He helped raise funds to establish a unit to treat blacks at the local tubercular hospital.

Edward W. Reed, M.D., was the first African-American board-certified general surgeon to practice in Memphis. In 1966, he was granted admitting privileges to Memphis’ Baptist Hospital and St. Joseph’s Hospital, two previously all-white hospitals. Dr. Reed received awards for his medical services to the poor and uninsured. He served on the boards of St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, Meharry Medical College and the American Cancer Society.

David Satcher, M.D., was president of Meharry in 1993 when President Bill Clinton appointed him as the first African-American director of the Centers for Disease Control. In 1998, he was confirmed as Clinton’s nominee for U.S. Surgeon General, the first African-American man appointed to that office.

Linzy Scott, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon, patented the Scott Spiral Knee Brace in 1980. He also served as the team physician for the U.S. Olympic team in 1981 and as the Gold Medalist National Amateur Basketball Team physician in 1983.

David Marshall Spotwood, M.D., practiced medicine in Pulaski. He was one of the first African-Americans in the South to be granted membership in the all-white American Medical Association. As the first African-American member of the Tennessee State Board of Education, Dr. Spotwood was instrumental in establishing the state’s Vocational School Program.

Matthew Walker, M.D., a Meharry graduate, professor and chairman of its Department of Surgery, served as president of the National Medical Association in 1954. He was among the first three African-American physicians to
be admitted for membership in the Nashville Academy of Medicine and the Tennessee State Medical Association.

**Georgia Patton Washington, M.D.,** in the 1890s, was the first African-American woman allowed to practice medicine and surgery in Tennessee. She traveled to Africa as a self-supporting medical missionary and eventually returned to the U.S. to practice medicine in Memphis.\(^\text{17}\)

**Levi Watkins, Jr., M.D.,** was the first African-American to receive a medical degree from Vanderbilt University in Nashville in 1974. He became internationally known as the first surgeon to implant the life-saving automatic implantable cardiac defibrillator in 1980.

**Emma Rochelle Wheeler, M.D.,** a practicing physician for more than 50 years and an advocate of pre-paid hospitalization plans, opened Walden Hospital in Chattanooga in 1915. Walden Hospital was the only hospital where black doctors could treat patients. It also operated as a nursing school.\(^\text{18}\)

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**Timeline**

**1837:** James McCune Smith was the first African-American man to earn a medical degree in the United States.

**1863:** The Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in Confederate states.

**1874:** The African-American community was in dire need of health care services.

**1876:** Meharry Medical College was founded in Nashville as the Medical Department of Central Tennessee College.

**1877:** The first graduates completed their work at Meharry with medical degrees.

**1881:** Tennessee segregated railroad cars.

**1890s:** Small medical schools and hospitals organized by entrepreneurial black southerners and white religious missionary groups from the North had sprung up throughout the region to train African-American doctors.

**1893:** Daniel Hale Williams, M.D., an African-American doctor, performed the first successful open-heart surgery.

**1895:** Dr. Robert Boyd and Dr. Miles Lynk founded The National Medical Association, the first permanent medical association for African-Americans.

**1896:** The Supreme Court of the United States of America upheld the “separate but equal” doctrine in Plessy v. Ferguson that lead to the return of institutionalized segregation in the South.

**Early 1900s:** The Flexner Report, critical of the standards and practices of medical schools in the U.S., prompted the forced closing of all but two historically black medical schools by 1926. The two remaining were Howard University in Washington D.C. and Meharry Medical College in Nashville.

**1915:** Dr. Emma Rochelle Wheeler opened Walden Hospital in Chattanooga, the only hospital where black doctors could serve their patients. It also served as a nursing school.

**1954:** The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Brown v. the Board of Education declared that racially separate public schools, and by extension, other racially segregated public facilities, were inherently unconstitutional.

**1965:** Amendments to the Hill-Burton act were passed to prohibit further use of public funds for the construction and operation of racially segregated hospitals.
In Memoriam:
Dr. Hiram Beene Moore
(1914-2005)
2005 BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee
Black History Month Honoree

Your pioneering spirit and leadership in Tennessee medicine helped light the way for future generations of health care professionals. Thank you for your legendary commitment to improving the health and well-being of our communities.

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