

Department of Medicine Inclusion Council Celebrates Black History Month Honoring Black Physicians



Regina Marcia Benjamin, MD, MBA

18th U.S. Surgeon General

Physician and a former vice admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps

The Department of Medicine Inclusion Council honors and celebrates the accomplishments of Regina Marcia Benjamin, MD, MBA, (born October 26, 1956). Dr. Benjamin may be best known for her tenure as the 18th U.S. Surgeon General, during which she served as first chair of the National Prevention Council. The group of 17 federal agencies was responsible for developing the National Prevention Strategy, which outlined plans to improve health and well-being in the United States.



It's not just her work at the highest levels of public health that earned her praise. Long before she was appointed "the nation's doctor" in 2009, Benjamin worked extensively with rural communities in the South. She received her M.D. degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and completed her residency in family practice at the Medical Center of Central Georgia. About her experience as the first member of her family to attend medical school, she stated "I had never seen a black doctor before I went to college."

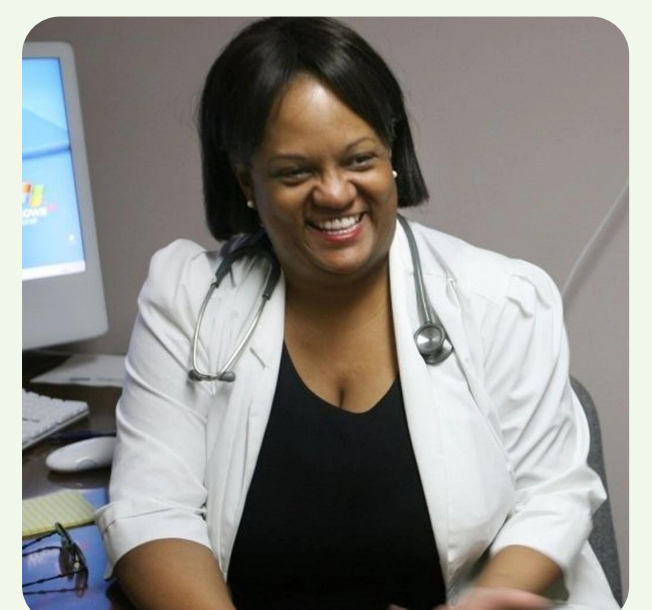
She is the founder and CEO of BayouClinic in Bayou La Batre, Alabama, which provides clinical care, social services, and health education to residents of the small Gulf Coast town. When her clinic was reduced to rubble by Hurricane Georges in 1998, Dr. Benjamin rolled up her sleeves and helped rebuild it, and continued to serve her patients by making house calls in her 1988 Ford pickup. Benjamin helped rebuild the clinic several more times, including after damage inflicted by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and a fire in 2006. Of the clinic, she said she hopes that she is "making a difference in my community by providing a clinic where patients can come and receive health care with dignity."

Dr. Benjamin's career has taken some interesting twists. While completing her undergraduate degree in chemistry from Xavier University in New Orleans, she served as a student intern-trainee for the Central Intelligence Agency. After earning her doctor of medicine degree in 1984, she served her internship and residency in family practice at the Medical Center of Central Georgia at Macon. From 1990 to 1995 she was a medical director at several nursing homes, and in 1993 she went on a medical mission to Honduras.



Benjamin accepting President Obama's nomination for U.S. Surgeon General in July 2009.

Dr. Benjamin earned an M.B.A. degree in 1991. The same year she was selected for the American Medical Association's "Unsung Hero Campaign". In 1995 she was named a "Person of the Week" on ABC World News Tonight with Peter Jennings, and in 1997 she received the Kaiser Family Foundation's Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights. She was interviewed by People magazine in the article "Always On Call," in May, 2002 and was the subject of an "Everyday Heroes" feature in the January 2003 issue of Reader's Digest.



Dr. Benjamin served on the American Medical Association's Women in Medicine Panel from 1986 to 1987, and was president of the American Medical Association Education and Research Foundation from 1997 to 1998. In 2002, as president of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama, she was the first African American woman president of a state medical society in the United States.