

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



Roselyn Payne Epps, MD, MPH, MA

Physician

Pediatrician, public health physician, women's health, advocate, administrator

The Department of Medicine Inclusion Council honors and celebrates the accomplishments of Roselyn Elizabeth Payne Epps, MD, MPH, MA, (December 11, 1930 - September 29, 2014). Dr. Epps may be best known for being the first African American elected national president of the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) in 1991. In 1992 she became the first African American woman president of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia.



Dr. Epps was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, and raised in Savannah, Georgia, where she grew up on the campus of Savannah State College. She went on to attend Howard University in Washington, D.C., where she earned both her Bachelor of Science, cum laude in 1951, majoring in zoology and chemistry and Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree with honors in 1955. Dr. Epps' passion for pediatric medicine was evident early on, noting "when I was 10 years old I decided I want to become a pediatrician. I was interested in a career that linked children, scientific inquiry, and helping others". After completing her internship and residency at Freedmen's Hospital (now Howard University Hospital), she became the chief resident.

Dr. Epps' career took her to various leadership roles in public health and pediatrics. She worked for the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health at the D.C. Department of Public Health from 1961 to 1971, focusing on early childhood health programs. She then completed a Master of Public Health degree at Johns Hopkins University in 1973.

In 1980, Dr. Epps became the first African American woman to serve as the Acting Commissioner of Public Health for the District of Columbia. She managed a large staff and a multi-million dollar budget, overseeing significant public health initiatives.



Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps

She became a professor of pediatrics and children's health at Howard University and received an M.A. from American University in Washington, D.C. and would go on to become the chief of the Child Development Division and director of the Child Development Center at Howard from 1984-1989.

She was known for her fierce advocacy for women and children, and her ability to lead organizations to expand health care access. She made history again in 1988 when she became the first African American and first woman to serve as the president of the Washington, D.C., chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She was a scientific program administrator at the National Cancer Institute from 1995 to 1998.

Dr. Epps served as a senior program advisor to the Howard University Women's Health Institute. Among her accomplishments during her time there were overseeing a program that aided disabled children and their parents, and she was the founder of the High Risk Young People's Project.

In 1991, she became the first African American national president of the American Medical Women's Association. She was also the first African American president of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia in 1992, further breaking barriers for women and minorities in medicine.

Throughout her career, Dr. Epps authored over 90 peer-reviewed articles and co-edited 14 books and monographs. She was honored with numerous awards, including the Federal Women's Award and the Elizabeth Blackwell Award. In recognition of her lifetime achievements, Dr. Epps was inducted into the D.C. Women's Hall of Fame.