

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



Bernard Anthony Harris, Jr., MD, MBA

NASA Astronaut

Physician, astronaut, venture capitalist, scientist, entrepreneur, and educator

The Department of Medicine Inclusion Council honors and celebrates the accomplishments of Bernard Anthony Harris, Jr. MD, MBA, (born June 26, 1956). Dr. Harris may be best known as the first African-American to complete a space walk and he conducted the first telemedicine conference from space with the Mayo Clinic. Dr. Harris has logged more than 438 hours and traveled over 7.2 million miles in space. While at NASA, he conducted research in musculoskeletal physiology and clinical investigations of space adaptation and developed in-flight medical devices to extend Astronaut stays in space.



During his youth, Harris lived on the Navajo reservations of Arizona and New Mexico, where his mother worked as a teacher. At the age of thirteen, Harris watched the Apollo 11 landing on the moon, and he knew that he wanted to become an astronaut. He received his M.D. degree in 1982 from Texas Tech University Health Science Center of Medicine and then completed his residency in internal medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.



After completing his residency, he did not forget his aspirations to become an astronaut. Harris followed a career path that would enable him to realize this dream and pursued research opportunities at Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, California, and completed a National Research Council Fellowship in Endocrinology. In 1988, Harris trained as a flight surgeon at the Aerospace School of Medicine, Brooks Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas. He then joined NASA Johnson Space Center as a clinical scientist and flight surgeon and was assigned to the Medical Science Division. Selected by NASA in January 1990, Dr. Harris became an astronaut in July 1991 and was assigned as a mission specialist on STS-55, Spacelab D-2, in August 1991, and later flew on board the Space Shuttle Columbia in 1993. In February 1995, he was the Payload Commander on STS-63, the first flight of the new joint Russian-American Space Program and the Space Shuttle Discovery, where he made his history making space walk.



Harris teaching youth at his summer science camp.

After leaving NASA in 1996, Harris led various companies with scientific and educational missions. In 1998 he founded The Harris Institute and The Harris Foundation to serve socially and economically disadvantaged communities to reach the most underserved populations in the areas of Education, Health, and Wealth. Some of those programs include the ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Summer Science Camp and the Dream Tour, both STEM programs to encourage minority students to pursue an interest in the sciences.

Harris also earned a Master of Medical Science from the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Houston.

He has served on numerous boards and commissions, and received honorary doctorates from multiple institutions. Harris also received the NASA Space Flight Medal, and a NASA Award of Merit.

Currently, Dr. Harris is CEO of the National Math and Science Initiative and President and Chief Executive Officer of Vesalius Ventures, Inc., a venture capital accelerator, that invests in early-stage companies in Medical Informatics and Technology. He is also a licensed private pilot, certified scuba diver, member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, and a life-long believer in education, goals, and hard work.

