

Tiffani L. Bell, MD: Caring for the whole child

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Staff News Writer



The AMA "Members Move Medicine" series profiles a wide variety of doctors, offering a glimpse into the passions of women and men navigating new courses in American medicine.

On the move with: Tiffani L. Bell, MD, a child and adolescent psychiatry resident in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

AMA member since: 2007.

What inspired me to pursue a career in medicine: I grew up in a household that greatly valued education. My mother was a nurse and saw my love of science and asked the doctors in her practice if I could shadow them. A few days before my 16th birthday my father passed away at 44 years old from a heart attack and obesity-related complications. This tragic event confirmed that I wanted to spend my life helping others treat and reduce the impact of chronic or preventable diseases.

Despite my academic success and passion for a career in medicine, I was often discouraged by others and reminded that there are very few African-American women who are doctors. I was told that very few people succeed in medicine—"Maybe you should try something else," they would say. This encouraged me all the more to buckle down and remain focused on my goal of becoming a doctor.

How I move medicine: By providing compassionate care while passionately advocating for health equity, reducing health disparities, and encouraging the youth of today who come from different backgrounds to consider a career in medicine and be tomorrow's health care leaders. It is my mission to live a life of passion, where I find purpose and joy in my work and daily life. Balance is key! I believe that is how members truly move medicine.

Career highlights: I am a member of the AMA Minority Affairs Section Governing Council and advocate for patients by helping to shape health care policies in ways that address the ever-present need for health equity and increased diversity and inclusion of minorities (ethnic, gender, religious) in health care and leadership. I received Substance Abuse Minority Fellowship from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and I have served on APA committees on psychiatry and the law, and mental health and faith.

I have presented at several conferences about microaggressions in medicine and reducing the stigma of mental health treatment particularly in minority populations. I also am very proud of helping to plan and participate in several AMA Doctors Back to School™ Program events across the nation and being "one of the faces of medicine" for children who may have never seen a young African-American female physician up close and personal. Increasing exposure is one of the best ways to increase interest in medicine.

Advice I'd give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine: Ignore the naysayers and believe in your ability to make an impact in the lives of those whom you hope to help. Reach out on

social media or in your community to find mentors who can help encourage you when you encounter adversity. Be sure to write down your reasons for wanting to pursue a career in health care and refer to it often. It will keep you encouraged as you journey toward your goals.

Aspect of my work that means the most: It has truly been an honor to pursue my life's calling by working as a physician. The road to medicine is not necessarily an easy one but has been worth every step of preparation. As I complete my training in child and adolescent psychiatry and transition into the young physician phase, I plan to complete additional training to be certified in obesity medicine and incorporate both psychiatry and obesity medicine into my practice.

I plan to continue my advocacy and outreach to underserved communities in hopes of inspiring others to pursue their dreams, even if they do not have many examples of physicians of color. I am most moved by my ability to positively impact the lives of those whom I encounter and meet my patients where they are in terms of understanding.

I appreciate having had the opportunity to move medicine on a larger scale by fighting for change in terms of health care policy and working in organized medicine here with the AMA.

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