



Dionne Hart, MD: From social worker to psychiatrist of the year

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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: Dionne Hart, MD, a specialist in addiction medicine and psychiatry who advocates for people with mental illnesses.

AMA member since: 2003.

What inspired me to pursue a career in medicine: I remember the toy doctor's bag my dad gave me for my fifth birthday. He grew up during the Jim Crow era so being a physician wasn't a dream he was able to pursue. He inspired and encouraged me to pursue my dream to become a physician.

How I move medicine: By advocating for patients living with brain disorders, adhering to the values practiced at my alma maters: "To inspire hope and contribute to health and well being" by always "placing the needs of the patient first."

Career highlights: Becoming director of Care From the Hart, an organization that provides patient advocacy and psychiatric services in Chicago and Rochester, Minnesota. I was elected as the first chair of the AMA Minority Affairs Section and was the first African-American woman to be elected to the Minnesota Medical Association's board of trustees. She was also named the Minnesota Psychiatric Society Psychiatrist of the Year.

Advice I'd give to girls and women interested in pursuing a career in medicine: I didn't have a straight path to medicine. At 20, I was divorced with three small children. In the African-American community, elders often say, "God doesn't give you more than you can handle."

In my opinion, God doesn't give more than a community can handle. I earned a degree at the University of Chicago and completed a residency at Mayo Clinic by accepting help from others and persisting even when told that my goals were impossible. All of three of my children earned college degrees as well as two graduate degrees. My personal motto: Let your haters be your motivators! Persist!

Aspect of my work that means the most: As a former social worker, I appreciate the opportunity to treat patients who have complex social and legal problems that are an indirect or direct consequence of their mental-health problems. My work gives me the opportunity to collaborate with multiple specialists to improve the health and function of my patients.

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