



## Mildred Olivier, MD: Reducing disparities in the profession

OCT 16, 2018

**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:** Mildred M.G. Olivier, MD, an ophthalmologist specializing in glaucoma in the Chicago area.

**AMA member since:** 1983.

**What inspired me to pursue a career in medicine:** My parents inspired me at a young age. My mother was a registered nurse and my father was a lab technician, but went to medical school when I was in college. I watched them be compassionate humanitarians who helped people. By the age of 8, I felt I wanted to join the profession as well.

**How I move medicine:** I am assistant dean for diversity at the Chicago Medical School/Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, which allows me to participate in trying to increase African-Americans, Hispanics and American-Indians in the profession.

In addition, I have a National Institutes of Health grant that supports the Rabb-Venable Excellence in Research in Ophthalmology program. It gives an opportunity to medical students and residents to present research in ophthalmology and promotes awareness of academic medicine in ophthalmology.

I was a key individual who pushed the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) to begin an initiative called Minority Mentoring in Ophthalmology (MOM) so that we can move the needle on diversity our field. I am also the chair of the diversity committee at the Association of Research and Vision in Ophthalmology, looking at these same issues within the research world of my specialty.

My parents were from Haiti, so I go there to do skills transfer and am very involved in global health.

#### **Career highlights:**

- | Served on the board of the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO).
- | Represent the AAO at the American Medical Association.
- | Served with the AMA Women’s Physicians Section.
- | Recognized for my humanitarian work by the American Glaucoma Society.
- | Received the Pan-American Association of Ophthalmology Benjamin Boyd award, and the Dr. Nathan Davis International Award in Medicine from the AMA.

I acknowledge that many others have done what I do, but never get recognized, so I accepted these awards knowing that it was on the shoulders of many others.

**Advice I’d give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine:** You have to love what you do because there are many challenges in medicine today. The development of interprofessionalism,

changes in how people learn and interact with discoveries such as artificial intelligence are on the horizon, and the advent of new diagnostic devices and treatment all demand attention.

At the end of the day, you have to want to get out of bed and feel that your day will be filled with opportunities to learn, curiosity and challenges. You cannot stop learning or educating yourself after medical school—learning is lifelong.

**Aspect of my work that means the most:** I learn so much from people, their diseases, their thoughts, their futures and how I impact their lives in medicine. Every person, every surgery, is different, which makes it exciting. It is all about the patient—all patients!

**How I advocate for physicians and patients:** I volunteered early in my career by doing vision screenings in high-risk populations and continued the aspect of skills transfer in international locales like Jamaica and Haiti.

My role at the medical school as the director of global health has allowed me to interact with medical students wanting a global health experience. I just edited a book talking about volunteering, which should start at home and extend to those who are in much need outside of our communities.

Physicians need to advocate for patients and the best way to accomplish that is through organized medicine. For me that means working with my specialty organization (AAO), the National Medical Association, the Association of Haitian Physicians Abroad, and Women in Ophthalmology—to name a few.

I have participated in these organizations to make changes that help our patients on a much higher level than the one on one experience I do in my office on a daily basis. Also, in my role at the medical school, I help educate physicians who reflect the community in which we are living so that we can increase communication and empathy in this noble profession.

**My hope for the future of medicine:** That we can continue to develop future leaders who are empathetic, sympathetic and trustworthy people who go beyond the minimum to extend themselves and think creatively about medicine.

Future physicians will need to balance what they studied in medical school with what they will continue to learn, given the explosion of technology and research that will allow us to all live full lives. I am getting older now, and will probably start visiting more physicians myself, and I want to know that this profession will not show any disparities in my future health care.

Visit [MembershipMovesMedicine.com](https://www.ama-assn.org/about/leadership/mildred-olivier-md-reducing-disparities-profession) to learn more about other AMA members who are relentlessly moving medicine through advocacy, education, patient care and practice innovation, and join or renew today.