



## Black History Month and Pioneering African American Physicians

Both American Heart Month and Black History Month are celebrated in February. While one provides an important opportunity to focus on the burden of cardiovascular disease, the other celebrates the contributions of African Americans over the course of history. In this month's installment of Harold on History, I think it's fitting to combine the two and focus on some of the pioneering African American physicians who have made seminal contributions to transforming cardiovascular care and improving heart health.

**Daniel Hale Williams, MD (1856-1931):** Williams was one of Chicago's first African American physicians upon his graduation from Northwestern Medical School in 1883. In 1891, he founded Chicago's Provident Hospital and Training School for Nurses which became the first black-owned and operated non-segregated hospital in the U.S. that also provided education and training for black physicians and nurses. In 1893, Williams was one of the first physicians to perform successful open-heart surgery, operating on the pericardium to repair a stab wound to the chest. Two years later, he founded the National Medical Association as a professional organization for black medical practitioners. He became a charter member and the first African American physician in the American College of Surgeons in 1913.

**Edward William Hawthorne, MD, PhD, FACC (1920-1986):** A professor and head of the department of physiology at Howard University and dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Hawthorne pioneered the use of large animal research in cardiovascular physiology and performed seminal investigations in myocardial contractility and cardiac muscle mechanics. He was a nationally recognized specialist in cardiovascular research and the causes of hypertension.

**John Beauregard Johnson, MD, FACC (1908-1972):** A professor and head of the Howard University Department of Medicine in 1949, Johnson was a pioneer in using angiocardiography and cardiac catheterization as diagnostic tools. He was also one of the first cardiologists to focus on the disparate effects of hypertension among African Americans. Johnson is also recognized as the first African American physician to be elected as a Fellow of ACC.

**Vivien Theodore Thomas, MD (1910-1985):** Without any education past high school, Thomas rose above poverty and racism to become a cardiac surgery pioneer and a teacher of operative techniques to many of the country's most prominent surgeons. As a surgical technician, Thomas developed the procedures used to treat blue baby syndrome in the 1940s. He was the assistant to surgeon Alfred Blalock, MD, in Blalock's experimental animal laboratory at Vanderbilt and later at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD. In 1976, he was awarded an honorary doctorate and named an instructor of surgery for Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

**Daniel D. Savage, MD, PhD, FACC (1944-1990):** An epidemiologist, researcher and author, Savage played a pivotal role in the establishment and operation of the minority section of the Framingham Heart Study. He is also credited for the establishment of left ventricular hypertrophy as an independent risk factor for sudden cardiac death.

**Elijah Saunders, MD, FACC (1935-2015):** Saunders literally wrote the book on hypertension in African Americans. He is also recognized for his pioneering patient education efforts to raise awareness of high blood pressure in churches and barbershops throughout the state of Maryland.

**Edward Sawyer Cooper, MD:** Cooper was the first African American to receive tenure as a full professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in 1972. He was elected as the first African American President of the American Heart Association in 1992 and chaired the writing committee that produced the scientific statement on *Cardiovascular Disease and Stroke in African-American and Other Racial Minorities*.

**Charles L. Curry, MD, FACC:** The first African American to receive training in cardiology at Duke University, Curry also became the first African American to receive board certification from the American Board of Internal Medicine. He served as director of cardiology at Howard University for 30 years and was the first African American to serve on ACC's Board of Trustees.

**Richard Allen Williams, MD, FACC:** Williams founded the Association of Black Cardiologists in 1974 with a focus on promoting the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease, including stroke, in African Americans and other minorities and to achieve health equity through the elimination of disparities in all people of color. He also authored the 900-page *Textbook of Black-Related Diseases* in 1975, which detailed medical conditions unique to African Americans.

**Edith Irby Jones, MD:** Admitted to the University of Arkansas College of Medicine in 1948, Jones was the first African American to enroll in an all-white medical school in the South. In 1959, she became the first African American female resident in the Baylor College of Medicine Affiliated Hospitals in Houston. In 1985 she was elected as the first female president of the National Medical Association. She has been a vocal advocate against health care disparities.

**Jay Brown, MD, FACC (1944-1994):** As chief of cardiology at Harlem Hospital in New York City, Brown was credited with rebuilding Harlem Hospital's acute coronary care unit. He was the project director for the Heart of Harlem Healthy Heart Program and developed new approaches to preventing cardiovascular disease in inner-city areas ranging from church-based health programs to promotion of healthy foods in groceries and restaurants.

**Kim Allan Williams Sr, MD, MACC:** Williams is the first African American president of the ACC. He is currently the James B. Herrick, MD, Professor of Heart Research and chief of cardiology at Rush Medical College in Chicago. He also served as chair of cardiology at Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit, where he started the Urban Cardiology Initiative. He developed the HEART Program (Helping Everyone Assess Risk Today) to screen churches and community groups for heart disease and stroke risk and has been a major advocate to reduce the devastating effects of cardiovascular disease within the African American community.

**Gary H. Gibbons, MD:** Gibbons is director of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, the third largest institute at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). He previously served as chair of the Department of Physiology, and professor of physiology and medicine at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta. He is recognized for his work on cardiovascular health of minority populations and focus on discovering novel mediators of vascular disease.

**Elizabeth Odile Oflil, MBBS, MPH, FACC:** A nationally and internationally recognized clinician scientist who has focused on cardiovascular disparities and women's health, Oflil was the first female president of the Association of Black Cardiologists. She led the initiative to implement the landmark African American Heart Failure Trial (AHEFT), the findings of which led to a change in practice guidelines for the treatment of heart failure in African Americans. She is currently director and senior associate dean at the Clinical Research Center and Clinical and Translational Research at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, GA.

**Jennifer Mieres, MD, FACC:** One of the leading contemporary experts and patient advocates in the field of cardiovascular disease in women, Mieres is associate dean of faculty affairs at Northwell Health. She also served as the first female president of the American Society of Nuclear Cardiology. She received the ACC's 2014 Women in Cardiology mentoring award for her dedication and commitment to mentoring women in cardiology.

**Hannah Valentine, MD:** Valentine is first-ever chief officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity at NIH. Her role is to lead NIH's effort to diversify the biomedical research workforce by developing a vision and comprehensive strategy to expand recruitment and retention, and promote inclusiveness and equity throughout the biomedical research enterprise. Prior to NIH, Valentine was at Stanford University where she served as senior associate dean for diversity and leadership at Stanford School of Medicine, and professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at Stanford University Medical Center.

This list is by no means comprehensive. Celebrate African Americans in cardiology on Twitter by sharing your favorite photo. Use #TheFaceOfCardiology and #HeartMonth in your posts. Don't forget to tag @ACCInTouch.

