

Black History Month Spotlight

Did You Know?

Dr. Alexa Canady (1950 -)

Dr. Alexa Canady, born on November 7, 1950, in Lansing, Michigan, became the first Black woman to achieve the title of neurosurgeon in the United States.

Encouraged by her parents who were graduates of Fisk University, a private Historically Black University in Nashville, Tennessee; she pursued academic excellence and fostered a deep love for learning. After completing her undergraduate studies at the University of Michigan, Alexa embarked on the challenging journey toward medical school. Despite encountering skepticism and obstacles due to her gender and race, she graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School in 1975, setting the stage for her groundbreaking career.

Dr. Canady faced systemic barriers and implicit biases as she entered a field predominantly occupied by White men, but undeterred, she pursued her residency in neurosurgery at the University of Minnesota. In 1981, she made history by becoming the first Black woman board-certified in neurosurgery, showcasing her exceptional surgical skills and resilience. Throughout her illustrious career, Dr. Canady dedicated herself to pediatric neurosurgery, specializing in the treatment of hydrocephalus, and served as the chief of neurosurgery at the Children's Hospital in Michigan from 1987 until her partial retirement in 2001.

Additionally, she conducted research and held a Professorship of Neurosurgery at Wayne State University. Her expertise and compassionate care transformed the lives of countless children and families, earning her widespread admiration within the medical community. Beyond clinical practice, Dr. Canady's influence extended to mentorship and advocacy, as she became a vocal proponent for historically underrepresented groups in neurosurgery. Through mentorship and leadership roles, she inspired a new generation of aspiring doctors, particularly women and minorities. Dr. Canady's contributions to neurosurgery and her trailblazing achievements have made an enduring impact on American medicine, serving as an inspiration for future generations, reminding us of the power of perseverance, determination, and resilience in the pursuit of excellence.

Sources:

Canady, Alexa. 2020. "What it Meant to Me." *Michigan Giving*. Retrieved January 30, 2024. (<https://giving.umich.edu/um/w/what-it-meant-to-me>).

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