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# Edith Mitchell named president of National Medical Association



**By Ayana Jones**  
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As the new president of the National Medical Association, Dr. Edith Mitchell will lead the organization's efforts to eliminate health disparities and promote equality in the nation's health care system.

Mitchell was appointed president on Aug. 4 during the NMA's annual Convention and Scientific Assembly in Detroit. She will serve a one-year term. The NMA, which has more than 30,000 members, is the nation's oldest professional society for African-American physicians.

"I am deeply honored to have been appointed as president-elect of this prestigious organization," said Mitchell, who is a professor of medical oncology at Thomas Jefferson University.

"There is still much work to be done with regards to disparities in medical treatment. I believe that we can all

work together and make great strides to address barriers in helping underserved populations get better care and lead to better health care in our nation."

Mitchell said she will work to bring health care stakeholders together — government agencies, the insurance industry, physicians and providers, institutions and medical schools — to ensure the health care system is patient-centered and that all Americans have access to good care.

One of the NMA's mission statements is to support and increase the representation and contributions of people of African descent by helping shape policy, through educational programs and community outreach.

Mitchell said one of the organization's major focuses will be on increasing the number of medical practitioners who are members of minority groups.

"It's well recognized that patients prefer and feel more comfortable with individuals with whom they have something in common and therefore having more providers who are members of minority and ethnic groups can lead to improvement in health care," said Mitchell, who is also the program leader of gastrointestinal oncology and associate director for diversity programs at Thomas Jefferson University.

"It is distressing to know that the number of African-American men applying to medical school and entering the medical profession has actually decreased."

A new report by the Association of American Medical Colleges notes that the number of Black males applying to and attending medical school in this country has declined since 1978. According to the report, despite an overall increase in the number of Black male college graduates over the past three decades, the number of Black male applicants to medical school dropped to 1,337 in 2014 (from 1,410 in 1978).

The number of enrollees also has declined, with 542 Black male students enrolled in 1978, compared with 515 in 2014.

To understand the reasons for the decline in Black male applicants and enrollees, the AAMC report provides the perspectives of Black premedical students, physicians, researchers and leaders such as Dr. Louis W. Sullivan, former secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Interviews with 11 individuals identify several major themes, including unequal K-12 educational opportunities, the absence of mentors or role models in medicine, public perceptions of Black men, career attractiveness and lack of financial resources.

The NMA has partnered with the AAMC to establish a program that will enhance opportunities for African Americans to enter medical school. Mitchell was exposed to the concept of patient-centered, culturally competent medical care early in life.

When she was just three years old, she witnessed her great-grandfather

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receive treatment from an African-American physician who made house calls. At the time, she was growing up on her family's farm in Brownsville, Tennessee.

"I was impressed by and encouraged by this African-American doctor who made house calls to people," Mitchell recalled.

"I told my parents and my great-grandfather that I was going to grow up and become a doctor. I never intended to do anything else."

During those days, African Americans who were extremely ill or needed emergency medical care were treated in segregated wards in Southern hos-

pitals.

Mitchell went on to receive her bachelor of science in biochemistry from Tennessee State University and her medical degree from the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond. Mitchell entered active duty after completion of her internship and residency in internal medicine at Meharry Medical College and a fellowship in Medical Oncology at Georgetown University.

Mitchell is a retired brigadier general in the U.S. Air Force, and was the first female physician to attain this rank. She served as senior medical Air National Guard advisor to the command surgeon and was the medical liaison

between the active Air Force and the Air National Guard.

As a practicing medical oncologist, Mitchell's research interests have included many cancer types such as breast, colorectal, pancreatic and other gastrointestinal malignancies. Her work has focused on developing new therapies as well as working toward better and more effective strategies and regimens using existing techniques.

Mitchell is a researcher with more than 100 publications in journals, book chapters and abstracts. She has received numerous grants in support of her work and served on several National Cancer Institute review panels.

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