



Dr. Amanda Williams Calhoun poses with Dr. Kasandra White, her mentee who is now an attending physician at KP Roseville, last week at the Doctors On Board Pipeline Program event.

## Dr. Amanda Calhoun Cultivates, Mentors Future Physicians of Color

Dr. Amanda Calhoun, Ob/Gyn and Physician Maternity Director, says she would not be where she is today without the African American female physician who served as her mentor when she was younger.

As a result, Dr. Calhoun makes it a priority to live by the words of her mentor and give back by “paying it forward.” When she is able, Dr. Calhoun dedicates her time to help students with an interest in medicine find their passion and navigate the long and complicated journey. In fact, she was one of the physicians honored at last year’s KP African American Professional Association annual celebration for her community work – specifically for mentoring African American and other underrepresented students interested in becoming physicians.

Dr. Calhoun’s volunteer work with local organizations - including Physicians Medical Forum and Sinkler Miller Medical Association - is focused on mentoring students and developing a pipeline that will increase the number of physicians from underrepresented

backgrounds serving in the East Bay. One focal area of Dr. Calhoun’s efforts is Physicians Medical Forums’ Doctors on Board Pipeline Program, a day-long workshop for high school, college, and post-baccalaureate students interested in gaining insight on what it takes to become a physician. The program includes networking, mock primary care and surgery clinics, role-playing, MCAT exam prep, and advice on admissions and financial aid – all at no cost to the accepted students.

By developing a diverse talent pipeline, diversity in the workforce is increased, thereby increasing the accessibility of healthcare to the communities served, Dr. Calhoun says.

“If you miss out on a patient’s community or their culture, you’re missing the mark,” Calhoun said. “You miss the opportunity to really help someone be well.”



Studies have shown that the physician-patient relationship is strengthened when patients see themselves as similar to their physicians in personal beliefs, values, and communication. Even the perception of similarity is associated with more trust, satisfaction, and therefore higher likeliness to listen to advice. Several factors affect perceive similarity, but race is the primary factor.

The importance of developing more physicians of color is also underscored by the historical mistreatment of African Americans and other disadvantaged groups, according to Dr. Calhoun. She explains that it's crucial to work on overcoming the history of mistreatment to provide culturally competent care, which means having a physician who understands and responds to patients' values, beliefs, language, and even the community from where patients come.

"African American people, in the history of American medicine, have not traditionally been treated well and that historical legacy of maltreatment – whether it's forced sterilization or forced infectious diseases – has left an indelible imprint on the relationship between traditional medicine and African American communities around the country," Calhoun said.

"Until we have more physicians of color building trust and building bridges, we are going to keep seeing health care disparities, and people not getting the care they need and deserve, largely centered on distrust," Dr. Calhoun said.

The underrepresentation of people of color doesn't just affect the Bay Area, but the health care industry as a whole. In 1978, there were 1,140 black male applicants to U.S. medical

schools, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges. But over time, rather than making significant positive progress, numbers have actually fluctuated between stagnant and regressive. In 2014, there were just 1,337 applicants. It wasn't until last year that there was a modest increase to 1,535 applicants.

Last year, African American students represented a mere six percent of U.S. medical school applicants, despite representing 13 percent of the U.S. population. The Latino population sees similar underrepresentation, comprising only five percent of applications, but constituting 18 percent of the general population.

And a mere fraction of those will formally enter a university. In 2015, a total of 1,349 African American students entered medical school out of a total 20,627 students.

Dr. Calhoun knows there is a lot of work to be done, but she is optimistic about the future. During the Doctors on Board program, which took place last weekend, she was able to see her own mentee and former intern – and now attending physician at KP Roseville – give back to the community by volunteering for the program. Dr. Calhoun's hope grows as she sees the engagement from youth, physicians and Kaiser Permanente grow as well.

"People are understanding that having a diverse workforce that mirrors our population really matters in terms of shrinking health care disparities and having great patient outcomes," Dr. Calhoun said.