

Saint Thomas More Black History Month 2006
African American Achievers Archives
Week 5
African American Healers



Died: 1902

Dr. Eliza Ann Grier, obstetrician/gynecologist

First African American woman licensed to practice medicine in Georgia.

Dr. Eliza Ann Grier was a freed slave. After emancipation, she decided to become a teacher and studied for seven years at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. But she aspired to a career as a physician, believing she could be of most benefit to others and earn a fair wage if she had a medical education.

She worked her way through the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania a year on, a year off. One year, she attended school. The next, she worked the cotton fields to raise tuition money for the coming year. As a result, it took her seven years to finish medical school. However, in 1897 she returned to her home in Atlanta and became the first African American woman licensed to practice medicine in the state of Georgia. Like other pioneer women physicians, Dr. Grier devoted a lot of her attention to the care of poor women and children. Sadly, Dr. Grier passed away after only four years of practice.

Dr. Keith Black, brain surgeon

Pioneered new treatments for cancerous brain tumors

Dr. Keith Black is a world-renowned neurosurgeon and scientist. His pioneering research has focused on the treatment of brain tumors and he has devised two innovative methods for treating brain cancer: A new way of getting cancer drugs directly to a tumor and creation of vaccines to enhance the body's immune response.

Dr. Black is best known for his discovery that a chemical in the body, bradykinin, can open the blood-brain barrier by causing capillary walls to be leaky. The blood-brain barrier is a protective network of blood vessels that block medications from moving to brain tissue. Now, chemotherapy can deal with the tumor itself without damaging delicate brain tissue.

Another innovative method based on Dr. Black's research is geared towards strengthening the body's own immune response. Cancer survives by making itself invisible to the immune system. Dr. Black's method makes the immune system recognize the tumor, mount an immune response against it and destroy it.

Dr. Black displayed an interest and talent for medical science at an early age. At age 18, he published his first scientific paper on the damage done to blood cells in patients with heart-valve replacements, which won the prestigious Westinghouse Science Award. In the same year, he enrolled at the University of Michigan medical school's accelerated program—a six-year degree in biomedical science and medicine—where his fascination with the brain began as early as his freshman year. In 1994, he patented his method of selective opening of abnormal brain tissue capillaries. Currently, he is director of the Cedars-Sinai Neurological Institute.



Born: 1957