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New book sheds light on legacy of physician, racism in medicine

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Photo by Zachary Linhares

By Michal Ruprecht, American Cities Health Journalism Fellow

 **Moderator: Usha Lee McFarling**, national science correspondent, STAT

 **Uché A Blackstock, M.D.**, founder and CEO, Advancing Health Equity; autho

"Legacy," Dr. Uché A Blackstock's New York Times best-seller, chronicles her journey as Harvard Medical School's first Black mother-daughter legacy — Blackstock, her twin sister and their mother all graduated from the school — and the legacy of health inequity and racism in medicine.

During her book talk at [Health Journalism 2024](#), moderated by STAT National Science Correspondent Usha Lee McFarling, Blackstock, who is also the founder and CEO of Advancing Health Equity, reflected on her mother's career in medicine as a first-generation medical student.

"Writing the book helped me see my mother," Blackstock said. "She did a lot of really wonderful things. But looking back, I recognize how really difficult life was for her ... I really recognize all of the barriers that she had to literally climb over to get to where she was."

Blackstock also spoke about her personal experience with race at an early age and how her environment shaped her understanding.

"I did have this opportunity to grow up in a very rare environment where I saw physicians who looked like me," she said. "I wasn't so very much aware of racial health inequities. I did notice that my neighborhood looked very different than others, but a lot of times when my parents and I would talk about what racism looked like, it was more interpersonal. I didn't recognize until I was older that I live in a redlined neighborhood."

After medical school, Blackstock's mother practiced at Brookdale Hospital in Brooklyn. Blackstock said her mother chose the hospital because it served an under-resourced community.

Inspired by her mother's career, Blackstock followed in her footsteps and trained at Kings County/SUNY Downstate Hospital in Brooklyn, which served a similar patient demographic.

"I went to work with historically underserved populations," Blackstock said. "In the years since then, I've felt my mom by my side in so many of my own interactions with patients. Her ability to listen to and truly care continues to be a model for me, and it's something that our patients are crying out for now more than ever."

Blackstock ended the talk with her thoughts on how medical professionals could combat racism in the field. She emphasized that there is no single solution and that change will require structural adjustments to how Black youth are introduced to medicine.

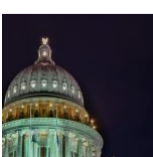
"I feel like we're coming up with a lot of the solutions that are needed in our communities, and that gives me hope," Blackstock said. "And then I love the medical students. I feel like so many of the medical students are so savvy, and they're the ones that really challenge us to do better."

Michal Ruprecht is a third-year medical student at Wayne State University School of Medicine and a health journalist based in Detroit, Mich. He has worked for ABC News, MedPage Today, The Michigan Daily and the American Public Health Association. He is a 2024 AHCJ American Cities Health Journalism Fellow.

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