

Beyond the Walls: Mentoring the Next Generation of Dental Professionals

African American Alumni Provide Community-Based Training in Georgia Communities Where Students Will Eventually Serve

VANESSA E. DOWNER, DMD

Dr. Vanessa E. Downer has practiced with the West Central Health District for over fifteen years and has been mentoring DCG students for much of that time. Dr. Downer enjoys her interactions with students. "A lot of them come from small towns, so they're used to the environment," she shared.

One of the students who benefited from Dr. Downer's mentorship was her niece. Dr. Jasmine Edwards ('16) made the decision to practice at the Albany Area Primary Health Care after graduating from the DCG, further helping to fill the gap of dental health professionals, particularly African American dentists, across the state of Georgia.

Dr. Downer decided on a career in healthcare early during her childhood in Albany, Georgia. She noticed the disparity in health care and the lack of African American healthcare providers around her. "I wanted to help underprivileged people and give them a better quality of life," reflected Dr. Downer. After earning her undergraduate degree from Albany State College (now Albany State University), a public historically black university, Dr. Downer acquired her dental degree from The Dental College of Georgia ('87) where she met her future husband, Dr. Tommy Downer ('86).



"I enjoy all the students. A lot of them come from small towns, so they're used to the environment."

DR. VANESSA E. DOWNER
WEST CENTRAL HEALTH DISTRICT
COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

AMBER N. IVEY, DMD



Dr. Amber N. Ivey, a native of Warrenton, Georgia, studied biology at Fort Valley State University, an HBCU, before completing a Doctor of Dental Medicine degree ('17) and two-year General Practice Residency ('19) at The Dental College of Georgia. Dr. Ivey practices dentistry in Augusta and continues growing as a health professional with continuing education courses such as the Augusta University American Academy of Implant Dentistry Maxi-Course.

Dr. Ivey's spirit of service was apparent throughout her time in dental school as she worked with several student organizations including the Student National Dental Association and American Student Dental Association as well as on the D.M.D. Admissions Committee.

With a passion for dentistry and service, Dr. Ivey explained that her service to the local community, including mentorship to dental students at The Dental College of Georgia, is fueled by the "desire for me to give back in ways that mirror the help that was extended to me along my journey."

Dr. Ivey is a proud member of the Augusta Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, an organization that serves with a mission committed to the constructive development of its members and to public service with a primary focus on the Black community.

"To whom much is given, much is expected! This statement alone has ignited the desire for me to give back in ways that mirror the help that was extended to me along my journey."

DR. AMBER N. IVEY - AUGUSTA, GEORGIA

EDMOND M. FRANKLIN, JR., DMD

Dr. Edmond M. Franklin, Jr., a native Augustan and alumnus of The Dental College of Georgia ('78), opened his dental practice in rural Burke County, Georgia in 1980 becoming the only African American dentist in that county.

Prior to dental school, Dr. Franklin attended Paine College and Xavier University, two of the nation's institutions known as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). He worked as a pharmacist for over 10 years continuing to work as a pharmacist in dental school.



"We go out of our way to be patient and understanding. I've been through the maze of dental school, and I know what they're going through. Our aim is to help."

DR. EDMOND M. FRANKLIN, JR., VIVID SMILES DENTAL CENTER - WAYNESBORO, GEORGIA

Dr. Franklin, beloved by his community and family, is a life member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated and holds positions in many professional associations. Working with the community-based clinical clerkship program since 2014, Dr. Franklin's caring, patient mentorship has been popular with generations of DCG seniors. "I think they enjoy coming down here. Some of them have rotated through here twice. I don't like working under pressure, and I don't create pressure for others. We go out of our way to be patient and understanding. I've been through the maze of dental school, and I know what they're going through. Our aim is to help."

Having observed Dr. Franklin's excellence in dentistry up close and personally, his son, Dr. Edmond M. Franklin, III, entered dentistry as a second career and added two additional dental practices to his family's legacy, which now includes three practices collectively called Vivid Smiles Dental Centers.

SHAYLA BROWNER, DMD



Dr. Shayla Browner earned her Doctor of Dental of Medicine degree in 2015 from The Dental College of Georgia at Augusta University. Currently, Dr. Browner practices dentistry at Albany Area Primary Healthcare (AAPHC) – Glover Dental Center and West Albany Dental Center located in Albany, Georgia.

A native of Decatur, Georgia, Dr. Browner attended the University of Georgia before attending DCG. Dr. Browner made her mark as a dental student academically as well as through her work with student organizations including the American Dental Association, American Association of Public Health Dentistry and the Student National Dental Association. She was vice president of her class and held leadership roles in Operation Smile and Dentists for Della. After several years of dental practice, Dr. Browner continued giving to her alma mater by becoming an adjunct faculty member with the community-based partnership program giving senior dental students an opportunity for mentorship and real-world experience in a clinical setting.

DR. SHAYLA BROWNER
ALBANY AREA PRIMARY HEALTHCARE
- ALBANY, GEORGIA

Community-based dentists voluntarily open their doors to our students. They take the time to mentor, teach and oversee students work. Dentists share their personal stories about their professional journey and how they chose to practice in public health clinics or underserved communities. This initiative wouldn't be possible without their generous commitment to our program. The students enjoy working in real-world environments, and they offer real value to these communities — communities they ideally will return to after they graduate. It is very rewarding when I hear a student who was initially so hesitant about the program say, 'This was the best thing that ever happened to me. I learned so much. I learned a lot about the community. Now I want to work there.' That is the reward.

We appreciate the generosity of our community partners who give back to their DCG roots, volunteering their expertise and experiences to rising dental professionals.