



Black History Month - Celebrating Neurology Leaders

February 5, 2024 - In celebration of Black History Month, Wake Up Narcolepsy (WUN) would like to recognize some leaders that have had immeasurable impacts on the medical world. Specifically, we'd like to focus on neurology, given that Narcolepsy is a disorder of the central nervous system.

To hear a clinical perspective on Black History Month, check out [Neurology Live's article with Jennifer Adrissi, MD by Marco Meglio](#). They talk about pioneers that have made large strides, but also the challenges still present.

Dr. Adrissi says "Black neurologists are very underrepresented. It is my personal and professional view that it is difficult to become what you haven't seen."

A few of the names on our list came from their mentions of them, so we thank them for not only having these important conversations, but for providing the basis for learning more about these leaders. Make sure to visit the links provided to read more on each person!

Here are a few names you should know when talking about the history of neurology:

[Dr. Clarence Sumner Greene, Sr.](#), born in 1901, became the first board-certified Black neurosurgeon in America in 1953.

Dr. Greene went to University of Pennsylvania, getting his degree in dentistry in 1926. He then went to a premedical program at Harvard University in 1927 and went back to University of Pennsylvania for his B.A. in 1932. He then graduated from Howard University College of Medicine in 1936 with his medical degree.

According to a Brain & Spine Report spotlight on him, "after seven years of general surgery residency and four years as a professor of surgery at Howard University, Dr. Greene was granted the opportunity to train in neurosurgery at the world-renowned Montreal Neurological Institute from 1947 to 1949 under Wilder G. Penfield."

He has a son, Clarence Sumner Green, Jr. who is a pediatric neurosurgeon.

[Dr. Audrey Shields Penn](#), born in 1934, was the first Black woman to serve as director of an institute of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 1998. She was director of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS).



Dr. Penn went to Swarthmore College and received her B.A. in chemistry in 1956. According to her American Neurological Association biography, she wanted a career with more human contact than chemistry had. She attended Columbia University, receiving her medical degree in 1960 and also completing her neurology residency.

[Dr. Alexa Irene Canady](#), born in 1950, was the first Black woman in America to become a neurosurgeon. She went to University of Michigan, originally getting her B.S. in zoology and graduating from the medical school in 1975. She became a neurosurgeon in 1981.

According to her biography on Changing the Face of Medicine, “Throughout her twenty-year career in pediatric neurosurgery, Dr. Canady has helped thousands of patients, most of them age ten or younger.”

She faced many challenges throughout her journey and career, but spoke of how her practice growth was “exponential” due to her focus on being patient-centered.

This is just a brief highlight on three amazing neurology leaders and we encourage you to learn more about them through the references provided. Join us in educating ourselves and others about important figures in Black history, this month and beyond.

References



1. Pioneers in neurology & neuroscience. American Neurological Association (ANA). Accessed February 1, 2024. <https://myana.org/pioneers-neurology-neuroscience>.
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3. Audrey S. Penn Biography. American Neurological Association (ANA). Accessed February 1, 2024. <https://myana.org/audrey-s-penn-biography>.
4. Sunday spotlight – dr Clarence Sumner Greene, sr.. Brain & Spine Report. Accessed February 1, 2024. <https://www.neurosurgerytraining.org/the-brain-and-spine-report/sunday-spotlight-dr-clarence-sumner-greene-sr>.
5. Meglio M. Clinician perspectives on black history month: Jennifer Adrissi, MD. Neurology live. February 22, 2023. Accessed February 1, 2024. <https://www.neurologylive.com/view/clinician-perspectives-on-black-history-month-jennifer-adrissi-md>.