

Kelly Laurent 00:09

Welcome listeners to the NYU Langone Nursing Station podcast. This series will highlight nurses coming together to share information about daily professional practice and initiatives to improve patient outcomes. My name is Kelly Laurent and I'm a Nursing Quality Specialist at the Tisch Kimmel campus in Manhattan. In today's episode, we would like to pay tribute to generations of black people who have helped shape our nation and honor their contributions and sacrifices and how appropriate to do this during February, which is Black History Month. This session is eligible for contact hours and in disclosure and compliance with ANCC's Commission on Accreditation. This educational activity does not include any content that relates to products and or services, have commercial interests and would create a conflict of interest. Now I would like to kick off this podcast and introduce our wonderful panelists for today.

Olga Husbands 01:05

My name is Dr. Olga Husbands. I've been here at the NYU Langone Orthopedic Hospital for the last 27 years. I work now as a Nurse Manager doing staffing and I'm over the float pool. I am very religious. I also have a passion for nursing. I love nursing. I love bedside nursing. I love teaching nursing, and I love encouraging young people to become nurses.

Jasmin Waterman Paris 01:36

Hello, everyone. My name is Jasmin Waterman Paris. I am a Nursing Professional Development Specialist at the Tisch campus and I have been a nurse here for 20 years, and I'm happy to be on the panel.

Kirstie Toussaint 01:49

Hello, everyone. My name is Kirstie Toussaint and I am the Senior Director for Nursing Operations at the Long Island campus. I oversee nursing finance for the departments of nursing and I am also the lead for patient experience for the Long Island campus.

Kelly Laurent 02:07

Thanks for joining us. So my first question is for you, Olga. As we celebrate Black History Month in February, can you tell us a little bit about its history and its evolution over the years?

Olga Husbands 02:18

Black History Month, it's really important, not just to this country, but to the world and not sure of many of you are aware, but it is celebrated not only here in the United States, but now it's celebrated in Canada and in Great Britain. So it was really created in order to dedicate and honor the achievements and the contributions of African Americans, as well as to recognize their role in the history of the United States. So how did Black History Month evolve? It was a long process. It actually occurred in 1915, it was the birth child of one Carter G. Woodson and Jesse Moorland, who founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, or ASNLH. This organization was actually dedicated to researching and promoting the achievements of African Americans. What Woodson thought was, we are going back to that beautiful history and it is going to inspire us to greater achievements. So as the singer Bob Marley has said, if you know your history, then you know where you're coming from, and I

believe that was his goal at that time. So in 1926, they developed the National Negro History Week, and it was actually celebrated the second week of February. Why was that chosen? It coincided with both Abraham Lincoln's birthday, which was February the 12th and the time that Frederick Douglass celebrated his birthday, which he celebrated it on February the 14th. Now, if anyone knows anything about slavery, slaves birthdays would not really recorded, but he believed that he was born in February, and so decided that February 14th will be his day to celebrate his birthday. So who's Frederick Douglass? Frederick Douglass was very prominent in African American history. He led the abolition movement, whose goal was to end the practice of slavery. He wrote three autobiographies basically on his life as a slave and one of the prominent ones was a Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass as an American slave. He was a publisher of the North Star in Rochester, where he not only discussed emancipation of the slaves, but he also helped to fight for women's rights. He also met with President Lincoln at that time, in order to improve the treatment of African American soldiers. And guess what, with his achievements, he was later appointed the Federal Marshal for the District of Columbia, and the recorder of the deeds. To go even further, he was the Minister and Consul General to Haiti. So he was really a prominent man to be recognized. So we fast forward now to the 1960s and there was a black activist by the name of Frederic Hammurabi, who had his cultural center called the House of Knowledge. That's where he was able to fuse African consciousness with the study of the Black past and instead of celebrating Black History Week, or Negro History Week, he decided we're going to do it for a month. Why should we limit celebrating our heritage to just a week, so he did for a month. During that time in the 60s, Black college students also became very aware, and they were demanding a Black Studies department. Not only was it changed from Negro History Week, it was called Black History Month. So that was the beginning of the Black History Month. But more importantly, it was in 1976, where Gerald Ford officially recognized Black History Month with his call to the public to "seize", quoting this, "seize the opportunity to honor the two often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history." Mind you, 1976 That was the bicentennial year of the independence of the United States of America. Then in 1986, which was the first year which Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday was celebrated as a national holiday. The US Congress on a joint resolution with both the House and the Senate, designated February as National Black History Month, and authorized President Ronald Reagan to issue presidential proclamation 5443, which noted, the foremost purpose of Black History Month is to make all Americans aware of the struggles for freedom and equal opportunity.

Kelly Laurent 07:14

Thank you, Olga. So my next question is for Kirstie, I want to speak a little bit about the Black nursing profession in particular here in New York City. Could you describe the vital impact that the Caribbean nurses had on our health care industry as well as the community setting?

Kirstie Toussaint 07:29

Sure, I'm happy to talk about that, you know, this topic is one that's near and dear to my heart. As a Caribbean American immigrant myself, paying attention to this history allowed me to understand why there were so many black nurses here in New York City, so I did kind of look into it and it came out of the post World War II era, there was an increase in the demand for nurses, not just here in New York City, but across the US as well as the Western Hemisphere, including in Canada. So despite the benefits of recruiting nurse candidates from overseas, there were educational and professional barriers that were placed on black nurses from the Caribbean diaspora. But despite those barriers, these nurses still immigrated to the US in the 10s of 1000s. Most of them settling here in the New York City area. That history of migration can still be seen and felt in many of our New York City hospitals. These nurses persevere despite the inherent challenges of being immigrants, they form their own professional organizations, because they were not included or welcomed in other organizations. Those organizations were designed to support other nurses who are either already trained as nurses and wanted to come to this country to work, or they pooled their money together to create nursing scholarships for nurses, for Caribbean Americans who were here in New York City. They also focus their efforts on population health, improving outcomes in their communities, really at a time when there was not a focus on health equity, unlike our efforts today. This made them true pioneers in their fields and it also helped to relieve the nursing shortages that began after World War II, and it paved the way for people like me and other nurses of Caribbean descent to flourish.

Kelly Laurent 09:21

Thank you for that history. Shifting gears a little bit, I want to now recognize and applaud the achievements of the Black trailblazers in health care. Olga and Jasmin, can you speak of some of the notable contributions that our listeners may not be aware of?

Jasmin Waterman Paris 09:36

Sure. So let's talk about a living legend that you may not be aware of; Licensed practical nurse Virginia Allen, and it was just want to shed some light on this living legend. So with the nursing shortage in New York, due to World War II, and at a time when many of the New York hospital's discriminated against black nurses, Seaview hospital in Staten Island, also called a sanatorium, hired 300 Black nurses who would later be referred to as Black angels by their patients. Living Legend, Nurse Virginia Allen, who was the last surviving Black Angel, and who began her career at 16 years of age was amongst this heroic group, the Black Angels, and had a significant contribution in helping to cure the tuberculosis outbreak. The Black Angels Taking Care exhibit is currently open at the Staten Island Museum at Snug Harbor and people can learn more about the Black Angels in a book titled "The Black Angels: The Untold Story of the Nurses who Helped Cure Tuberculosis" by Maria Smilios. Another living legend currently is the Dr. Betty Smith Williams. Dr. Betty Smith Williams was the first African American nurse to graduate from Case Western Reserve and was the first black person to teach at the college university level in the state of California. Dr. Betty Smith Williams is a founder of the National Black Nurses Association, which I'm a proud member of, amongst other members of our diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging group and she has paved the way for so many other

leaders. She has been a huge influence, and I'm excited to have met her. I've seen her at conferences, and this is exciting. Thank you.

Olga Husbands 11:39

Then we have Mary Seacole. Mary Seacole originated from the beautiful Caribbean island of Jamaica, and she had experience with cholera. Actually, her husband, her first husband died in Jamaica from cholera and she took care of Panamanians when there was a huge cholera outbreak. But what makes her even more interesting is that when the Crimean War occurred in Europe, she took her own money and traveled. She wanted to serve in the British Army and, of course, she was refused. She took her own funding, and under the auspices of Florence Nightingale, she served in the Crimean War, to help take care of British soldiers during that time, those who were wounded. Today, she is recognized in England, there's actually a statue of her because she was actually one of the first Black nurses of the British army.

Kelly Laurent 12:49

Wow, I didn't know any of that. Okay, so that's great. So now I just want to ask a question to all the panelists, how can we all be part of Black History Month?

Olga Husbands 12:59

I'm going to say knowledge is power. Today, there's a lot of political things that's going on, which we're not going to get into today because that is not the purpose. But as I stated before, if you know your history you know where you're coming from, and it's great for people to learn the history of what Blacks have contributed to this country and worldwide. There are Blacks who are really instrumental, particularly in the healthcare field, that it helps to bring us forward and in society, on the whole, there are many, many things that Black people have contributed to, where if we did not have those items, you have to wonder what type of a world we would be living in. So I think it's just for people to just go and read, just go and look up something, ask a question. We always say ask questions to be wise. Who is the who, what, where, and when? Why is Black history so important? We need to know where we came from. We need to know how we can move forward, and how we can continue to contribute to make this world a better place.

Kirstie Toussaint 14:09

Well, I would certainly piggyback on what Olga talked about, you know, knowledge is power. If someone of any background, any history, race, religion, creed, wants to do something during Black History Month, I would say Google is your friend. Go on there, you know, it doesn't have to be in healthcare, whatever background you're in whatever industry you're in, whatever topic that you are passionate about, see what the contributions of Black Americans are and that actually helps to expose you to potentially something that you may not have known in the past. We live in a world where we can literally go every single day without interacting with people from different backgrounds without seeing where they live without seeing the kinds of food they eat, and how they think and what their experiences are like. So I would also say, you know, if there's opportunities perhaps put yourself in somebody else's shoes, somebody of a different backgrounds, just to see what their what the day in their life looks like. I think it really goes a long way and I would say for Black Americans to you know, this is Black History Month is an

opportunity to learn about Black history. But for black Americans, perhaps it's also an opportunity to learn about other experiences as well because we can sometimes live in a box, in a space where we only know what we know. Perhaps that month is really a reminder to really get out of our comfort zone, learn something different about somebody else, put yourself in someone else's shoes, and it'll go a long way to further understanding each other.

Jasmin Waterman Paris 15:42

I agree with everything that Dr. Husbands and Kirstie said. I also want to add that it's important for us to be self aware. Take opportunities to get involved at your local level in your facilities, if you're a staff, nurse, participate, as well with providers and things such as bias training. Also thinking about how you can influence the experience for someone of color, make someone feel welcome. As Kirstie mentioned, learn about someone, perhaps a cultural day, learn a little bit about your colleagues. It is also important to allow for diversity and various settings, allow for a diverse nursing workforce, allow for a diverse nursing pipeline so you can contribute into those ways too. In an academia setting, the professors can help to encourage and influence and also be fair in their interactions with their students who are of color so those things can help shape a nurse's experience. I think for many of us, like myself, I am Black history. I am a nurse leader. I am a board member, and a past vice president of the New York Black Nurses Association. I am a nurse innovator, I'm a nurse entrepreneur, I'm a positive example to my community. So we can all be, whether we are Black or not, part of Black history is just you have to figure out your lane. Whether you're an ally, whether you seek your own education on a topic, whether you participate in an event, but getting to know about someone else's life would be helpful and working at an institution here where it's nice to learn about other people's ethnicity and what's important to them. We're not the same. Our panel is very different. I identify as Black, African American, and my colleagues who are also on the panel, they identify as Caribbean American. So there are differences. We're all not the same. So it's also important to learn what makes everyone unique.

Kelly Laurent 17:56

Those are very valuable words of wisdom. Thank you, everyone. Now, Jasmin, as we recognize the significant achievements made by black inventors throughout history, I believe you'd like to close with a short story.

Jasmin Waterman Paris 18:05

So I wanted to just talk about what would a day in the life of a nurse be like without Black inventors. So just imagine you're getting ready for work, you attempt to set your home alarm system, you lock your door, and you proceed with your commute to arrive to work on time. But guess what? Your day didn't go as planned. The video home security system designed by Marie Van Brittan Brown, an African American nurse from Queens, New York does not exist. You're stuck in traffic and witnessed a car accident because the three way traffic light invented by Black inventor Garrett Morgan doesn't exist. Or perhaps your train is delayed due to train workers stopping frequently to grease the train gears by hand, because the lubricating cup invented by Black inventor Elijah McCoy, also known as the real McCoy doesn't exist. You can't notify your supervisor about being late because your cell phone invented by Jesse Russell and his team

doesn't exist. You can't use your office phone to have your meeting with your nursing leadership. Because guess what? The telephone and the telegraph invented by Black inventor Granville T. Woods doesn't exist. You can't try it at work because your personal computer designed by Black inventor Dr. Mark Dean doesn't exist. Would our hospital be among the top five hospitals in the country for cardiology and heart surgery without the first successful open heart surgery performed by Black surgeon Daniel Hale Williams? Perhaps. Dr. Daniel Hale Williams also founded the first Black owned Hospital, which was the first non segregated hospital in the United States. Here are a few of the many inventions by Black inventors, which have made our day to day flow with ease.

Kelly Laurent 18:42

Thank you, Jasmin. So I would like to thank our listeners and everyone today for joining us and for our panelists for being a valuable resource to our nursing staff. We hope that our listeners found this discussion helpful and useful to their practice. You can find links to the resources on our website. For any questions or comments, please email, #nursingstationpodcast and as a reminder, this session is eligible for 0.5 contact hours. A survey will be posted with this recording and you can access it and complete the evaluation to obtain your certificate. Thanks for joining everyone.