

Homer G. Phillips and the Legacy of Public Hospitals in St. Louis

In 1905 Dr. John Green, President of the St. Louis Medical Society, with a keen understanding of the plight of public hospitals in other cities issued this charge to St. Louis physicians on the eve of opening a new City Hospital:

“Will it vouchsafe to the pauper a medical care equivalent to that which his pecuniarily more fortunate fellow citizens receive? Will it fulfill to the utmost its function of providing instruction in practical medicine to the undergraduate student? And will our hospital be thoroughly in accord with the spirit of medical enlightenment?”

*Presidential Report, St. Louis Medical Review
January 14, 1905*

A succession of public hospitals failed in that charge -- City Hospital No. 1 (Max C. Starkloff), City Hospital No. 2, and St. Louis County Hospital, despite their professed missions, opened as segregated facilities. Only under duress, and toward the twilight of their existence, did they admit and treat irrespective of race, creed or color. There is one bright exception, the Homer G. Phillips Hospital. It opened its doors as a truly “public” facility in 1937, still shrouded in intrigue after the mysterious assassination of its main advocate and benefactor, attorney Homer Gilliam Phillips. At a time in American society when people of color were restricted from most medical training programs, the Homer G. Phillips Hospital became the premier training ground for African American medical professionals – many of whom remained to deliver high quality health care in the St. Louis area and who later assumed prestigious positions throughout the nation. The successes of its subsequent years of operation (as well as the complex issues surrounding its closure) became legendary in the annals of public hospitals. It closed its doors on August 17, 1979, followed by St. Louis City No. 1 in 1985, St. Louis County Hospital in 1987, and St. Louis Regional Hospital in 1997. While we cannot now walk the halls of Homer G. Phillips Hospital, we can learn much from its history, presented by the very people who strived diligently to provide culturally sensitive care to the patients who so deeply trusted and loved them and their hospital. This lecture series is named in honor of the historic Homer G. Phillips Hospital in St. Louis.

The Homer G. Phillips Public Health Lecture Series

“Moving from Charity Care to Partnering with Communities to Improve Health”



Honoring: Howard Venable, MD

Guest Speaker:

Consuelo H. Wilkins, MD, MSCI

*Vice President for Health Equity, Vanderbilt University Medical Center,
Executive Director, Meharry-Vanderbilt Alliance*

Friday, October 25, 2019

Washington University School of Medicine
Eric P. Newman Education Center (EPNEC)
320 South Euclid Avenue
Saint Louis, Missouri 63110

6:00 p.m.
Cocktails
Atrium

6:30 p.m.
Dinner
Great Rooms

7:30 p.m.
Lecture
Great Rooms

Consuelo H. Wilkins, MD, MSCI



Consuelo H. Wilkins, MD, MSCI, is Vice President for Health Equity at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and Associate Dean for Health Equity, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. Dr. Wilkins leads the Office of Health Equity in connecting existing health equity initiatives while developing system-wide efforts to address disparities in health. Dr. Wilkins also serves as Executive Director of the Meharry-Vanderbilt Alliance. Her primary responsibilities as executive director include developing and supporting collaborative initiatives and programs in biomedical research, community engagement and interprofessional learning.

Dr. Wilkins is a Professor of Medicine at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine and holds a faculty appointment at Meharry Medical College.

Dr. Wilkins is a Principal Investigator (PI) of the Vanderbilt Institute for Clinical and Translational Research, where she brings together academic researchers and community members to improve community health and healthcare through community-engaged research. She is also a PI on two other NIH-funded centers: the Vanderbilt-Miami-Meharry Center of Excellence in Precision Medicine and Population Health, which focuses on decreasing disparities among African Americans and Latinos using precision medicine; and the Vanderbilt Recruitment Innovation Center, a national center dedicated to enhancing recruitment and retention in clinical trials. Dr. Wilkins' prior research focused on understanding the complex intersection between cognitive impairment, frailty and depression.

Prior to joining the faculty at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in 2012, Dr. Wilkins was an Associate Professor in the Department of Medicine, Division of Geriatrics, with secondary appointments in Psychiatry and Surgery (Public Health Sciences) at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. She served as Founding Director of the Center for Community Health and Partnerships in the Institute for Public Health, co-director of the Center for Community Engaged Research in the Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA), and director of "Our Community, Our Health"- a collaborative program with Saint Louis University to disseminate culturally relevant health information and facilitate community-academic partnerships to address health disparities. She also served as medical accuracy editor for the St. Louis American newspaper.

Dr. Wilkins' served on numerous national committees and boards, past and present--to name a few, includes the HHS Secretary's Advisory Committee on Human Research Protections, CTSA Consortium Collaboration/Engagement Domain Task Force (Lead Team), Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) Advisory Panel on Clinical Trials Subcommittee on Recruitment, Accrual, and Retention, and the PCORnet Patient and Consumer Engagement Task Force (co-chair).

Dr. Wilkins earned a Bachelor of Science in microbiology (magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa) and a Doctor of Medicine from Howard University. She completed residency training in Internal Medicine at Duke University Medical Center and a Geriatric Medicine fellowship at Washington University School of Medicine/Barnes-Jewish Hospital. Following her medical training, Dr. Wilkins earned a Master of Science in Clinical Investigation from Washington University School of Medicine.

Howard Venable, MD



Howard Venable, MD is known for the revolutionary changes he made in the field of ophthalmology. Dr. Venable was born January 27, 1913 in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, to mother, Agnes Hill, and father, William Venable. He moved to Detroit, Michigan as a child and spent most of his early life there. In 1939, he attended medical school at Wayne State University in Detroit. Dr. Venable completed his residency at Homer G. Phillips Hospital and New York University.

After completing his residency, Dr. Venable joined the faculty of Washington University in St Louis in 1958, as the first African American to work on the staff. He became an Assistant Professor Emeritus of Clinical Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences. Dr. Venable retired in 1987, and was well known for his desire to train young black students interested in ophthalmology. During his career, he was also in charge of three ophthalmology

departments, St. Mary's Infirmary, People's Hospital of Saint Louis, and Homer G. Phillips Hospital.

Dr. Venable became chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology at Homer G. Phillips Hospital in 1943. In over thirty-six years, he taught more than one hundred ophthalmology residents, thirty-nine of which were African American students.

Dr. Venable knew many black people suffered from eye diseases like glaucoma and cataracts which occur at a greater rate in African Americans than in the white population. Working at Homer G. Phillips Hospital, he trained African American ophthalmologists to treat these diseases at one of the few black-operated hospitals in the nation. He left his position as head of the Department of Ophthalmology in 1979. Dr. Howard Phillip Venable served as chairman of the section on Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat on the National Medical Association and secretary of the Council on Scientific Assembly. He was a member of the St. Louis Medical Society and the St. Louis Ophthalmic Society.

In 1984, Dr. Venable and his wife, Katie, created the Venable Student Research Fund in Ophthalmology at Washington University School of Medicine. This fund supported resident research projects and encouraged more black students to join the ophthalmology field.

Dr. Venable was awarded the Outstanding Humanitarian Service Award from the American Academy of Ophthalmology in 1994. Dr. Venable was a staunch advocate of civil rights. In 1956, he purchased a tract of land in segregated Creve Coeur and began building a home. After an outcry by the local white "citizen's committee," then Mayor John T. Beirne took the land by eminent domain and had it converted into a park, which still bears the Beirne name. A local movement is now underway to rename the park Venable Park in honor of Dr. Howard Venable.

He was married to Marjorie Stokes in 1940, then married Katie Waters after his first wife died. He had two children Louise and Allen. Dr. Howard Venable died August 8, 1998 in St. Louis, Missouri at the age of 85.