

SPOTLIGHT ON: JEANINE DOWNIE, MD

In dermatology, we are fortunate to have many insightful practitioners and great teachers and mentors. Some are bright stars in our special universe — others unsung heroes. All of these colleagues have much to share from wisdom to humor to insights into dermatology and life. This column allows us to gain insight from these practitioners and learn more about them.



Jeanine B. Downie, MD, is the Director of Image Dermatology, P.C., in Montclair, NJ. Dr. Downie received her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and Psychology. She has a Master's of Arts degree from American University and her Doctor of Medicine from SUNY-Health Science Center at Brooklyn. She then completed her dermatology residency at Mount Sinai

Medical Center in New York City, where she was the Chief Resident. She is on staff at Mountainside Hospitals and Overlook Hospitals and has published 15 scientific papers.

Dr. Downie is a medical consultant for The Today Show, Good Morning America, The Early Show, The View and Ten Years Younger. She has been featured on The Montel Williams Show, The Rachael Ray Show, MSNBC and many others. Her first book, *Beautiful Skin of Color*, is a comprehensive skin care guide for Asian, olive and dark skin (Harper Collins, 2004).

Q. WHAT PART OF YOUR WORK GIVES YOU THE MOST PLEASURE?

A. The part of my work that gives me the most pleasure is having satisfied, happy patients who I am able to help with their skin conditions, overall cosmetic improvement and skin health care goals. The patient care and the close relationships I have sustained throughout the years have been terrific, as well as the trust my patients put in me. I named my practice Image Dermatology as my skin was ravaged by acne and atopic dermatitis when I was younger and I wanted to help people with their self-image. The opportunity to nurture and advise my patients has made me grow with them. I feel it is still truly an honor to be a doctor.

Q. WHO WAS YOUR HERO/MENTOR AND WHY?

A. My mother and my grandfather have both been my heroes and mentors. My mom is the first black female to graduate from University of Medicine/Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) back when it was Seton Hall Med Dent in 1960. She is a practicing pediatrician. My grandfather was a dentist back in the roaring days of Harlem in the 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s. They both influenced me greatly and taught me that patients come first. They instilled a love of science and knowledge in me. They taught me "patient manners" and showed me through their examples that kindness and compassion are critical.

Q. WHICH PATIENT HAD THE MOST EFFECT ON YOUR WORK AND WHY?

A. The patient that had the most effect on my work was a male schizophrenic patient from the Bronx VA when I was chief resident at Mount Sinai. He had a giant tumor the size of a backpack on his back. He would let no one biopsy it or touch him as he felt god was telepathing him through his tumor. I spoke to him with kindness and respect every day for at least a month about our need to determine what this tumor was so we could help him. He finally relented and allowed me to biopsy him and to take large tissue samples. He had a stage IV amelanotic malignant melanoma. As he was dying, he told me he was "crazy" but that he appreciated the way I spoke to him with dignity and allowed him free choice. From then on, that patient's voice rings in my head when I am dealing with a difficult patient, a hard-to-reach patient or a mentally unstable patient. Treat patients with kindness and respect. Always put your best face forward, your best tone forward. Treat with dignity and respect and allow them to have grace.

Q. WHICH MEDICAL FIGURE IN HISTORY WOULD YOU WANT TO HAVE A DRINK WITH AND WHY?

A. The best piece of advice I have ever received is that "your life is composed of the decisions you make, so do your best to make good decisions." I believe the first person to give me this advice was Professor Dane, the

chairman of undergraduate biology at Tufts. These life decisions include what career you choose, who you marry, how you spend your time/waste your time, if you abuse drugs or alcohol, if you overeat, whether you use condoms when having sex — all of these decisions can make or break your life. Another great piece of advice from my wise grandmother was "treat people the way you want to be treated." This resonates for me still today, 26 years after her death. I try to always display my manners and warmth to my patients, to my staff and to everyone I deal with in all kinds of situations. Most of the time I am successful, but sometimes I am not.

ONLINE EXTRA

Visit www.skinandaging.com to read an expanded version of this column, which includes Dr. Downie's answer to what she believes is the greatest political danger to the field of dermatology. ■



Section Editor: Benjamin Barankin, MD, FRCP

Dr. Barankin is a dermatologist based in Toronto, Canada. He is author-editor of six books in dermatology, and is widely published in the dermatology and humanities literature.

He is also co-editor of *Dermanities* (dermanities.com), an online journal devoted to humanities as they relate to dermatology.

ONLINE ONLY

ONLINE EXTRA

Q. WHAT IS THE GREATEST POLITICAL DANGER IN THE FIELD OF DERMATOLOGY?

A. The greatest political danger in the field of dermatology is our political lack of action. Unfortunately, doctors are sheep. We allowed the insurance companies to dictate and decrease our worth. They even call us providers and not physicians. We have no tort reform and we feel helpless. Washington runs on political action committees (PACS) and lobbyists, and yet doctors do not give money to their PACS. Every dermatologist reading this article should write a check to DermPAC and SkinPAC and take these organizations seriously. They are here to help us and funding them properly gives us power. The insurance companies spent over a 130 million dollars in the second quarter last year alone lobbying against health care reform. We are in "it" up to our eyeballs and need to spend money like the tort reform lawyers do to fund our wishes and our best future. Or not.