



NIHCM
FOUNDATION

**COVID-19 and the Legacy of Racism:
Vaccine Hesitancy and Treatment Bias**

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

(In order of appearance on the program)

Sheree Crute, MA is the Director of Communication for the National Institute for Health Care Management (NIHCM) Foundation in Washington, D.C. Ms. Crute joined NIHCM in 2020 to develop and lead the organization's communications strategy. Previously, Ms. Crute was director of communications and marketing for the Dornsife School of Public Health at Drexel University, a research and policy communications specialist for the New York Academy of Medicine, and a strategic communications consultant for Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, focusing on research and policy.

In addition, Ms. Crute is a veteran journalist with decades of experience writing about public health, health inequity and disparities, medicine, and consumer health. She has written for *Washington Monthly*, *The Root.com*, *Health* magazine, *Consumer Reports on Health*, and is co-founder of *FierceforBlackWomen.com*, a website focusing on black women's health.

Sheree has a BA in Journalism, an MA in International Affairs from New York University and a certificate in public health practice from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. She was also a 2011 University of Southern California/Annenberg School of Communications National Reporting Fellow.

George A. Mensah, M.D., FACC, is a senior advisor in the Immediate Office of the Director at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In this position, Dr. Mensah leads an integrative, trans-Institute effort to advance the translation of scientific discoveries in heart, lung, and blood diseases research to clinical and public health practice nationally and globally.

Dr. Mensah's primary focus is in the application of implementation and systems science approaches to address research translation gaps in order to maximize health impact in the prevention and treatment of heart, lung, and blood diseases and the elimination of health inequities.

Dr. Mensah is a clinician-scientist trained in internal medicine and the subspecialty of cardiovascular diseases. His professional experience includes 17 years of public service between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). He has had management experience as a chief of cardiology; head of a clinical care department; and the Surgeon General's nominee to the Board of Governors of the American College of Cardiology as governor for public health.

In addition to his public service at CDC, Dr. Mensah had 10 years of experience in direct patient care, teaching, and research at Vanderbilt University and the Medical College of Georgia (MCG). He was a professor with tenure at MCG, director of the medical specialties practice at the MCG Hospitals & Clinics, and department head of cardiovascular care at the VA Medical Center in Augusta, Georgia. He holds a merit of proficiency from the American Society of Echocardiography and has been designated a “hypertension specialist” by the American Society of Hypertension.

At CDC, Dr. Mensah held several leadership positions over nine years, including the first chief of the Cardiovascular Health Branch; an interim center director; and chief medical officer at the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Most recently, he served as vice president for nutrition science within the global research and development unit of a major multinational food and beverage company. Dr. Mensah is adept at motivating and energizing local and global teams and fostering results-oriented strategy execution. He excels at building partnerships with a variety of organizations.

Over the course of his career, Dr. Mensah has authored more than 400 manuscripts, abstracts, book chapters, and an atlas on heart disease and stroke published by the World Health Organization (WHO) and CDC. He recently served as chairman of the Cardiovascular Expert Group of the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study. This group of study collaborators is a consortium that includes Harvard University, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Queensland, and the WHO.

Areas of expertise: cardiovascular medicine, public health science, health disparities research, and global health.

Lauren Powell, PhD, recently named among Fortune's 40 Under 40 in Healthcare, Dr. Lauren Powell is the President & CEO of The Equitist, LLC and concurrently serves as the Vice President and Head of TIME'S UP Foundation's Healthcare Industry work. In this role she spearheads national efforts to champion health equity, and eradicate racism and sexism from health care workplaces.

For more than a decade, Dr. Powell has been immersed in broad and progressive leadership positions where she's been unapologetically outspoken about racial injustices and health inequities. Her professional and personal experiences spearheading equity efforts in healthcare, state government, academia, and public health, make her a nationally sought-after leader, speaker, and consultant on all things health equity.

Formerly the Director of Health Equity for the Commonwealth of Virginia, Dr. Powell was the youngest Black woman and the first with a PhD to serve in this powerful role where she led statewide strategic plans and initiatives towards pushing Virginia's 8.5 million residents closer to health equity.

Dr. Powell has an established track record as a community-engaged, social epidemiologist with doctoral training on leveraging data for equity. She earned a Master in Public Administration at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Clinical and Population Health Research at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Dr. Powell deeply values mentorship and community engagement. She actively seeks opportunities to help mold and encourage the next generation of leaders in health equity.

Prior to her graduate school matriculation, she held positions coordinating clinical research studies at a number of prestigious medical institutions including: The Johns Hopkins Schools of Medicine and Public Health, the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, and the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Powell has been featured on several national and international news sources and outlets including: Marie Claire, Politico, The Guardian, Huffington Post, NPR, BBC, CNBC, PBS NewsHour, NowThis, Newsy, and Cheddar.

Andrea D. Willis, M.D. in her leadership role at BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, Dr. Willis ensures that all clinical initiatives and quality endeavors support the needs of our members, and contribute to the overall health and well-being of our communities. As the standard bearer for clinical excellence and positive health outcomes, she keeps quality care at the forefront of discussions with our customers, providers, regulators and stakeholders.

Meeting Dr. Willis means quickly recognizing her passion for better health and a better health care system, which stems from her early professional experience as a pediatrician. Within BlueCross, she has served as medical director, advising on care structures for many successful programs, including the CHOICES Long-Term Services and Support program for the state's Medicaid population, and CoverTennessee.

Before joining our company, she served the State of Tennessee as director of CoverKids, helped develop Tennessee's federally approved State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and served as deputy commissioner for the Tennessee Department of Health.

Dr. Willis is a fellow with the American Academy of Pediatrics and a member of the Tennessee Medical Association. She earned a Master of Public Health from Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health and a Doctor of Medicine from Georgetown University School of Medicine.

Dakasha Winton is senior vice president and chief government relations officer for BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, which has more than 6,000 employees and serves 3.5 million members in the state and across the country.

In this role, Winton leads the company's state and federal government relations efforts and oversees analysis of proposed legislation. She also serves as the BlueCross liaison to federal and state industry associations and advocacy groups.

Winton most recently served as director and associate general counsel for state government relations and public affairs for BlueCross and was the primary liaison to the Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance and other state agencies. In this capacity, she played a principal role in regulatory oversight matters, compliance implementation, and program and policy design.

Before joining BlueCross, Winton was chief counsel for Insurance, Securities and TennCare oversight divisions of the Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance. She was also a staff attorney for the department.

Winton graduated cum laude from Tennessee State University and earned her law degree from the University of Memphis. She is a member of the Nashville and Tennessee Bar Associations, and the American Health Lawyers Association. She was appointed to

serve on both the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and the Tennessee Credit Life Advisory Board.

In 2010, she was named a Fellow of America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), and she actively participates in legislative and regulatory workgroups for both AHIP and the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association. She was named a 2016 Fellow of the Nashville Health Care Council, and she is the 2016 recipient of the Napier-Looby Bar Association Trailblazer of the Year Award honoring outstanding achievements in the Nashville legal community.