

Esi M. Rhett-Bamberg, MD '07: A Girl Born on Sunday

Less than 20 years ago, Esi M. Rhett, MD '07, was making her mark and setting records as a sprinter and honor student at Moorestown High School, in New Jersey. At the same time, inspired by an aunt and a cousin, both practicing obstetrician-gynecologists, she set her sights on a career in medicine. “My aunt Jeanette was so knowledgeable. Whenever I had a question about science or anything else, she knew the answer. I wanted to be just like her,” she says.

Now, as a young physician, Dr. Rhett is off to a remarkable start both in her profession and in her community. In the fall of 2015, she was one of 100 physicians at varying stages of their careers chosen to be profiled in a new publication, *Against All Odds: Celebrating Black Women in Medicine*, by Crystal Emery. The honor came just four years after Dr. Rhett’s first faculty appointment, as assistant professor of anesthesiology at the University of Texas (UT) McGovern Medical School at Houston, where she com-

pleted her residency.

“It was a huge honor to be included in *Against All Odds* so early in my career,” she says. “I stand on the shoulders of the other physicians in the book. My story has just begun, but I hope that when my life and career are over, I can be the shoulders to someone else!”

Also in 2015, Dr. Rhett was recognized as a “community hero” at the Fourth Annual Top 50 Black Health, Medical and Wellness Professionals Awards Ceremony in Houston.

Another influential force and mentor was her grandfather, Hermann Rhett. A member of the historic

Montford Point Marines, “he persevered through many challenges to achieve his dream of becoming a computer engineer,” she says. “He worked so hard every day of his life and inspired the whole family.”

Hermann Rhett’s granddaughters were his greatest love. “He paved the way and encouraged me to always do my best,” Dr. Rhett says. “And when I got my MD, he’d write ‘Dr. Rhett! Dr. Esi Rhett’ all over the place!”

At Rutgers University’s Douglass College, Dr. Rhett was on the dean’s list and was chosen for the Big East Academic All-Star Team. She participated in Access-Med, an articulated program that supports members of minorities underrepresented in medicine. In addition to completing the pre-med curriculum, she studied in Spain, preparing to work with a diverse patient population, and graduated with a minor in Spanish.

“Esi was memorable: brilliant, patient, and caring,” says Kamal Khan, MD, director, Rutgers Office for Diversity and Academic Success in the Sciences. As director of the Access-Med MCAT preparation course, Dr. Khan admired Dr. Rhett’s extraordinary focus, a quality shaped in part,

BY KATE O’NEILL



COURTESY OF ESI M. RHETT-BAMBERG, MD '07

he believes, by her self-discipline as an athlete.

Dr. Rhett clearly recalls the day she was converted to the field of anesthesiology. During her surgical rotation, “an anesthesiologist stepped forward and enticed me to take a look behind the drape,” she says. “The OR was exciting, but a lot was going on behind the scenes.” A year later, she graduated from Robert Wood Johnson Medical School with an award for academic excellence in anesthesiology.

At UT, Dr. Rhett split her internship year between internal medicine and pediatrics, a foundation for working not only with adults but also with the children she would see at UT Health affiliate Lyndon B. Johnson General

Hospital.

In 2010, during her residency, Dr. Rhett accompanied her mother and sister on a trip to Ghana to visit a girls’ school sponsored by her family’s church. It was the second trip for her mother, Gloria, a former teacher and principal, and the first for Dr. Rhett and her sister, Amandi, a mechanical engineer.

Independently, Dr. Rhett turned the trip into a small medical mission, performing simple examinations such as blood pressure measurement on the students and local residents. She also distributed basic medical and hygiene supplies donated by Memorial Hermann–Texas Medical Center. “These students had been ‘purchased’ out of an illegal form of ritual servi-

tude that makes them outcasts in the community. But at the school, they learn a marketable trade and receive a seed fund upon graduation,” says Dr. Rhett. “Our mission was to dedicate a new building and show the girls that they are loved by us and by God.”

Dr. Rhett says she and her sister were deeply moved by the experience, “because we look like these girls. And the girls were so proud to see their American ‘cousins’ doing so well and giving back to their ancestral homeland.

“We traveled around the countryside, where local residents, energized by President Obama’s 2009 visit, were excited to meet an African American,” she says. “It especially intrigued them that I had a Ghanaian name, Esi, which in their language means ‘a girl born on Sunday.’”

In 2011, after appointment as a full-time assistant professor at UT, Dr. Rhett continued to travel the world. A year later, she received the Outstanding Clinical Instructor award from the Houston location of the Case Western Reserve University Master of Science in Anesthesia Program.

Carin Hagberg, MD, who chaired the

—Continued on page 46

Huda Sayed, MD '11: A Second Home at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

—Continued from page 39

not want her to leave! Everyone looked up to her there. She is an inspiration of what a doctor should be. She never rushes and takes time with every patient.”

Dr. Sayed still stays in touch with peers and mentors from BCP and the medical school. A BCP alumna helped connect her to Emory, and Dr. Khan remains a close mentor—he even officiated her marriage. And one of her fel-

low alumni, Kristen Kenan-Tate, MD '11, is the godmother of her daughter.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in Rutgers and Robert Wood Johnson Medical School programs,” she says. “Medicine is not a right, it’s a privilege, and I feel lucky to have earned the privilege to care for others.” **M**

James Metz, MD '95: Beaming into Medical History

—Continued from page 41

as a grassroots effort, it was the first cancer website in the world—and it even preceded Yahoo. Dr. Metz began working on the website in 1996, during his residency training, and moved into the editor-in-chief’s role in 2000. The idea was to get information out to thousands of people around the world in a way that was appropriate for both medically naive and clinically savvy audiences. The site isn’t segmented—there are no specialized portals. People can go as deep as they’d like on any cancer-related subject matter they choose.

Novel personalized programs help patients learn about cancer treatments and predictions about toxicity. The site also offers information and assistance on cancer survivorship. A small group—just seven full-time people—manages the site, with another 200 contributing information. “A big area of interest now is blending data-based content with medical records,” says Dr. Metz. “Because we’ve gathered information on every diagnosis, we can tailor educational information based on what we know holistically about a

diagnosis—even down to the mental health needs. It’s that integrated.”

OncoLink has received numerous awards and recognitions. The team is developing interactive content and personalized information for people, while collecting data to move the field forward. OncoLink has more than 285,000 unique visitors every month.

Where It All Began and Where He’s Headed

“I’ve been so fortunate in my career,” says Dr. Metz. He looks back at his Robert Wood Johnson Medical School experience and how well it prepared him for the significant academic and clinical career milestones he’s tallied up. “I had such good clinical training. I felt like I could step into any environment,” he adds.

That confidence—together with his preparation and education at the medical school—has resulted in a remarkable career. His influence, inquisitiveness, and knowledge have contributed to advancements in patient care and cancer treatment here and around the world. **M**

Esi M. Rhett-Bamberg, MD '07: A Girl Born on Sunday

—Continued from page 43

Department of Anesthesiology at UT for nine years, knew Dr. Rhett first as a resident and then as an outstanding clinical and academic colleague. “Students gravitate to her,” says Dr. Hagberg. “She is kind-hearted, generous, understandable, patient, and fun.”

As an attending anesthesiologist, “Esi is not just astute and skilled, she’s a great member of the team,” says Dr. Hagberg. “Patients trust her, deservedly, and, having volunteered to work as the sole anesthesiologist in the gastroenterology suite while the service was building up—with some of the sickest, most complex patients—she earned the lasting respect of nurses and physicians across multiple departments.”

Dr. Rhett is the immediate past president and an executive board member of the Mary Susan Moore Medical Society. Established in 1991 and renamed six years later for the first black woman to practice medicine in Texas, the organization supports African-American women physicians and provides health education and advocacy to communities of need in the Greater Houston and Galveston area.

A major part of the society’s work consists of mentoring premedical and medical students and raising money for scholarships. In 2014, it received permission from Crystal Emery to show a 10-minute clip from her documentary *Black Women in Medicine* at its Scholarship Awards event. Afterward, Emery stayed in touch as she developed the film into *Against All Odds*, the book in which she would include Dr. Rhett’s story.

It seems right that the relay team member whose name means “a girl born on Sunday” is devoting her career