

# Huda Sayed, MD '11:

## A Second Home at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

**T**he earliest memories of Huda Sayed, MD '11, are helping her father in his clinic in Ethiopia. She was passionate about medicine throughout her childhood, with a clear desire to become a physician someday. After immigrating to the United States at age 17, she was self-conscious about her accent, and her undergraduate science courses were more challenging than she expected. The teenager realized she was going to need more than passion to fulfill her dream.

**A**s an undergraduate student at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, she found that college was a breeze—until she started biochemistry. “The class shook me to my core,” Dr. Sayed shares. “It was incredibly challenging, which scared me—school had always been my strength until now.” During her freshman year, she met Kamal Khan, MD, director, Office for Diversity and Academic Success in the Sciences, who helps students of diverse backgrounds pursue careers in health care. Dr. Khan encouraged her to apply to the

BY JILLIAN PRIOR

Biomedical Careers Program (BCP) to better prepare her. “Early in our relationship, I discovered Huda Sayed doesn’t give up. I knew she would be an amazing physician with the help of the program,” he says.

Founded in 1978, BCP is an academic enrichment program for undergraduate students who are from a group underrepresented in medicine, or come from an economically disadvantaged background, and are interested in science careers. The six-week summer program is sponsored by Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Rutgers University, and the New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund.

For Dr. Sayed, the most meaningful aspect of BCP was enabling her to believe in herself. Program staff, mentors, and volunteers are often BCP alumni or people from similar backgrounds. She greatly benefited from hearing about their similar struggles and how they overcame barriers. “I was devastated that my lifelong dream of medicine was over until I met people who said, ‘I am like you, I went through what you did, and I succeeded,’” she says. These shared experiences motivated Dr. Sayed by making her journey in medicine feel “doable.”

The program also built her confidence by not just encouraging but requiring the students to speak up, in a small setting of only 20 of them. “When I came to the U.S. at age 17, I could never imagine talking in front of people, or giving a speech,” says Dr. Sayed. “BCP forced me out of my comfort zone and peeled back another layer of myself. Now I regularly give motivational talks and speeches.”

After she met many faculty and students of the medical school through BCP, it was an obvious choice for her. “Robert Wood Johnson Medical



COURTESY OF HUDA SAYED, MD '11

School was a second home to me,” says Dr. Sayed. “I was comfortable and felt totally supported. It was a great fit.” Although medical school was rigorous and challenging, and while studying there she experienced the death of her aunt and ongoing illness of her father, she did not become discouraged. “I am proud of my struggle because it made me the physician I am today,” Dr. Sayed says.

During her time at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, she also taught in BCP. “You can’t forget where you came from,” Dr. Sayed shares. “I wanted to give back to the next generation and show that they can have a similar, or even better, experience.” In addition,

she founded a Youth Science Enrichment Program and Health Professions Recruitment Exposure Program at the medical school: mentoring initiatives, still active today, that encourage underrepresented minority elementary, middle school, and high school students to pursue a career in the health professions. For this, Dr. Sayed was honored by the Student National Medical Association Chapter at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in 2016.

“Recently, I learned that one of the students from the program is now finishing college at Princeton and is part of BCP,” says Dr. Sayed. “I feel humbled that the program I started helped with this individual’s path to medicine.”

Dr. Khan notes, “I still call Huda and ask her to speak with students here at the medical school who are struggling. She never says no. She is a person who gives and gives. Even as a busy student herself, managing coursework and family illness, Huda dedicated her time to mentoring students.”

After graduation, Dr. Sayed completed an internal medicine residency at Cooper University Hospital in Camden, followed by a hospice and palliative medicine fellowship, also at Cooper. She chose end-of-life care because of her experience with her aunt’s death.

In September 2016, Dr. Sayed joined Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta as an assistant professor of medicine and attending physician at Grady Memorial Hospital, focusing on end-of-life and palliative care. “I was attracted to Grady Hospital because its urban demographic is similar to Camden. I have always enjoyed working with the forgotten population and advocating on their behalf,” Dr. Sayed says.

Dr. Khan remembers the sentiments from Dr. Sayed’s Camden peers when she moved to Atlanta: “Camden did not

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## James Metz, MD '95: Beaming into Medical History

**H**e's considered the father of proton beam therapy at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). And he's had a hand in the development of proton therapy facilities around the world to treat cancer. But his passion for radiation oncology was ignited right here at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. James Metz, MD '95, remembers the day it happened.

**I**t was during Career Night," Dr. Metz recalls. "There were tables set up for different specialties. I was set on pursuing medical oncology, so I was looking for that table. Then I saw the radiation oncology representative sitting in a corner with no one around. I got into a great conversation with him, and he encouraged me to do a summer research program, which I did." He adds, "I loved the clinical and research exposure. I knew this was it. That experience was the reason I decided to make radiation oncology my career."

The combination of the humanistic side of medicine and the technical side appealed to him. "I enjoy the intense

BY LYND A RUDOLPH

relationships with patients, and the fact that radiation oncologists treat any area of the body," he says. "I get to treat people of all ages, babies through adults. For me, it was that broad mix of patients I would see, and the exposure to what was going on with technology, that was the ideal blend of the two worlds."

### An Enviable Career

**T**oday, Dr. Metz serves as chair, Department of Radiation Oncology, at the Perelman School of Medicine and holds the Henry K. Pancoast Endowed Professorship. At Penn since 1996, he is also currently associate director for clinical services and programs at the Abramson Cancer Center of the University of Pennsyl-

vania—a National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center since 1973—and is considered a leading expert in the design and implementation of proton therapy facilities. His relationship with Penn began with a residency there, and then he was hired to lead the proton beam initiative.

"When I was hired in 1999, there were only two proton centers operational in the country. They hired me to help build the one at Penn," says Dr. Metz. "We opened the Roberts Proton Therapy Center in 2010—it ended up being the fifth center opened in the United States and the largest fully integrated proton therapy center in the world, based on the number of rooms and patients treated." Including other radiation oncology services, the program treats about 450 patients a day on site and at 11 satellite facilities.

Proton therapy is external beam radiotherapy. It works by aiming energized particles, in this case protons, onto the target tumor. Because of the accuracy of the beam, proton therapy delivers a higher dose of treatment directly to the tumor, while sparing healthy tissue. Patients with cancers of the brain and skull base, breast,

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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**

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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

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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