

FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

“Black History Month is an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans and a time for recognizing their central role in U.S. history. Also known as African American History Month, the event grew out of “Negro History Week,” the brainchild of noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans.”¹

The week expanded to a month in 1970 when Kent State University’s students, faculty and administration designated the entire month of February as a celebration of Black History.² “Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as Black History Month.”¹

The Black History Month 2022 theme, “Black Health and Wellness,” explores the legacy of not only Black scholars and medical practitioners in Western medicine, but also in other alternative medical practices (e.g., birthworkers, doulas, midwives, naturopaths, herbalists, etc.). The 2022 theme considers activities, rituals and initiatives that black communities have done to promote wellness.³

Following the 2022 theme, listed below are just a handful of the many achievements by African Americans in the Medical Field.



1940 - Charles R. Drew, ScD researched the nature of human blood and ways to process and store blood plasma in “Blood Banks”, until needed by injured patients. He directed the blood plasma programs of the United States & Great Britain in World War II. Once the war ended, he started work on a storage program for the blood at the American Red Cross. After learning that the officials planned to segregate the blood according to ethnicity, Drew resigned.

1964 - Jane Wright, MD was an accomplished surgeon and revolutionary cancer researcher. Her work elevated chemotherapy from a last-ditch effort for the treatment of cancer to a feasible therapy option. She developed a way to deliver heavy doses of anticancer medications to tumors located within the spleen, kidneys, and other hard-to-reach places.



1988 - Patricia Era Bath, MD was the first Black female physician to receive a patent for a medical device. Her technique and device, the Laserphaco Probe, are used during cataract surgery. Bath stated that eyesight is a basic human right, and in 1976 founded the American Institute for the Prevention of Blindness.

Emmett Chappelle, a WWII veteran, is a NASA inventor and a biochemist. Chappelle held 14 patents, mostly relating to fluorescence tests, and in 2007 he was inducted into the National Inventor’s Hall of Fame for his work of fluorescence in organisms.



Kizzmekia Corbett, PhD, is an immunologist who led the National Institutes of Health (NIH) team in the development of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. She was also recently named one of TIME magazine’s 2021 Heroes of the Year.

Sources: 1. www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-month
2. www.kent.edu/smc/black-history-month 3. asalh.org/black-history-themes/
Photo Sources: Drew - Britanica.com, Wright & Bath - blackpast.org/african-american-history,
Chappelle - National Inventors Hall of Fame and Corbett - HSPH Harvard EDU Magazine

