



UPDATE | January 31, 2018

Meet Our Advocates: Dr. Glenmarie Matthews



Where are you from?

I am originally from the island of Jamaica and migrated to the United States during my teenage years to attend college and further my education. I have spent most of my adult years in the United States and currently living in New York City

What's your specialty or area of expertise?





particularly within the Caribbean, along with international medical education for abortion and contraception.

What first inspired you to become a doctor?

Its starts with a beautiful story that I remember so clearly. Shaded from the tropical sun by the vast banana leaves, I scurried around in my yard in Jamaica looking for fresh mangoes dropped by the morning sea breeze. Sweetness filled the air as I hopped from one fruit to another, acting out the role of the worker bees hovering silently around me. I climbed into my neighbors' yard, just as silent, trying to gather that forbidden fruit. I heard a scream. Thinking of being caught, I dashed over the fence, past the banana trees, over the mangoes and finally pushing the door to enter the kitchen. The scream was from my cousin. She was only a few days away from her due date, and to see her in pain was very frightening. I did not know what to do. My aunt called a cab and grabbed the supplies she had previously prepared for this event. Arriving at the hospital in no time, my aunt carried my cousin with the help of a doctor into the emergency room. Of course, I was only allowed in the waiting area of the emergency room, but I could see the panic and concentration in everyone's faces. By the end of the night, I was looking at my cousin resting with her newborn at her side. Listening to the doctor talk kindly to my aunt, I could tell he really cared. This made me feel like there was nothing at all to worry about. Through this doctor, I saw who I wanted to be. From that day on, I always assisted my relatives when they became ill, wanting to make them feel cared for, kindling the flame of medicine that has not been extinguished.

What story about one of your patients most sticks with you?

A 28-year-old (we'll call her Jane) was 18 weeks pregnant with her third child. I met Jane on a busy Wednesday morning in clinic, after several weeks of her struggling with the decision of whether to continue her pregnancy or have an abortion. Jane had recently started a new relationship and lost track of when she



was very excited about the possibility of a new baby. A detailed ultrasound revealed several fetal abnormalities in this pregnancy. Her last pregnancy was also complicated, with reports of fetal anomalies, and her now 10-year-old son has numerous physical and developmental disabilities and requires constant attention. She did not feel able to manage another special-needs child.

Moments before we met, Jane had repeated the ultrasound that confirmed all the anomalies seen on the prior scan. When I entered the room, Jane was sitting on the table with tears flowing out her eyes.

She said, “Why me, why am I faced with this decision again?” She felt that for weeks no one had been giving her the full information about the diagnosis, and that even today she was only told to come see the Family Planning doctors to have an abortion. Jane was very conflicted about this decision: should she continue the pregnancy and have a second child who could have all the same needs as her son, or should she have an abortion? I spent over an hour with Jane, listening to her story and discussing with her all her options again. Jane decided she was going to have an abortion; she started explaining all her reasons with great fear and lots of tears. Jane returned to the clinic two additional times before the surgery was performed and then went through with what I would say was one of my most emotional abortion experiences to date.

On her two-week follow up visit, Jane was so grateful for her care and said it felt like I stopped seeing all my other patients to listen to her story. She was grateful that I didn’t force a decision on her but allowed her to take her time to process all the information she was given, and that we gave her accurate information.

The most important thing I took away from Jane is that, despite our busy schedule, it’s always important to make every patient feel like they are being heard and spend a little time with the individual to understand the complexity of their decision. Always remember that each patient is unique.



I'm a woman of color from an island where abortion is legally restricted and is the eighth leading cause of maternal mortality. The thing that drives me the most to become an advocate is access to safe abortion, both locally and internationally. In general, I care about access to health care and reproductive health care equality across all races.

Who is your social justice hero?

This is probably the hardest of all the questions, but if I have to choose one, I would go with Jamaica's national hero, Nanny of the Maroons.

Every week, our Meet Our Advocates series showcases the talents and passion of one of our doctors and finds out, in their own words, what inspires them to be physician-advocates. Glenmarie Matthews, MD, MBA is a member of the Leadership Training Academy Class of 2018.

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