American Urological Association and Urology Care Foundation Celebrate Black Pioneers in Medicine During Black History Month

BALTIMORE, Feb. 1, 2022 /PRNewswire/ -- Nearly 50 years ago, President Gerald Ford became the first president to officially observe Black History Month. In a message delivered on Feb. 10, 1976, he called on the nation to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

Today, the American Urological Association (AUA) and Urology Care Foundation continue to express a longstanding recognition of Black History Month and the many contributions African Americans have made to our society and culture. While many are familiar with such iconic figures as Martin Luther King Jr., Maya Angelou and Rosa Parks, there are many lesser known Black men and women, including pioneers in medicine and urology, whose achievements should also be recognized.

Born in 1762 and living and working most of his life in slavery, Dr. James Durham is considered the first African American to work as a doctor in America. As a young man, he was owned by a number of doctors, who taught him how to read and write, mix medicines and serve and work with patients. Durham had a flourishing medical practice in New Orleans until 1801 when the city restricted his practice because he did not have a formal medical degree.

In 1837, Dr. James McCune Smith graduated from the University of Glasgow, making him the first African American to earn a medical degree.

In 1864, after years as a nurse, Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler became the first African American woman in the United States to receive a medical degree, making her the first Black woman physician in the U.S.

In 1895, the National Medical Association was founded, since African Americans were barred from other established medical groups.

In 1936, Dr. Richard Francis Jones (Dr. R. Frank Jones) became the first African American Diplomate of the American Board of Urology. He is the sixth African American ever to become a board-certified specialist in the U.S. At the time, Black physicians were not allowed to join medical specialty societies, which kept them from working in most hospitals. Dr. Jones is also the first African American member of the AUA.

In 1950, Dr. Helen O. Dickens became the first African American woman admitted to the American College of Surgeons.

Today, Dr. Bobbylynn Hawkins remains the nation's first African American full professor of urology and the sixth female urologist to be certified by the American Board of Urology. Additionally, she is the first female urologist in the United States Army, and served more than 30 years as a military command surgeon, earning the rank of Colonel and serving in the Gulf War.

While February brings extra attention to the contributions of African American pioneers, it also raises awareness of the prevalence of urologic diseases such as prostate, kidney and bladder cancer, which disproportionality affect the African American population, as well as the need for increased diversity within the practice of medicine to help provide culturally competent care.

- Cancer is the second leading cause of death among Black people in the United States. Prostate cancer is more common in Black men. It tends to start at younger ages and grow faster than in men of other
racial or ethnic groups, but medical experts do not know why. African American men are more likely to be diagnosed with prostate cancer and they are nearly 2.5 times more likely to die of the disease.

- Nearly half of all African American adults have some form of heart disease. African American adults are much more likely to suffer from high blood pressure (hypertension), heart attacks and stroke deaths than white adults. Recent studies have shown a very strong association between erectile dysfunction and heart disease.

"Despite continuous advances in scientific knowledge and technology, the African American community still lags behind other racial and ethnic groups in public health awareness and access to health care," said Raju Thomas, MD, AUA President. "As we recognize the contributions of Black pioneers in medicine and urology this February, the AUA remains committed to closing that gap in awareness and access."

For more information about the life and legacy of Dr. Richard Francis Jones visit: 

**About the American Urological Association:** Founded in 1902 and headquartered near Baltimore, Maryland, the American Urological Association is a leading advocate for the specialty of urology and has nearly 24,000 members throughout the world. The AUA is a premier urologic association, providing invaluable support to the urologic community as it pursues its mission of fostering the highest standards of urologic care through education, research and the formulation of health policy.

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