

The Rebecca Lee Crumpler Scholarship

Honoring the first Black woman to earn a medical degree in the US



OVERCOMING BARRIERS

As a proud alumna of BUSM and a Black American woman who dedicated my

medical career to the care of women, I am thrilled to support efforts to memorialize Dr. Crumpler's incredible pioneering spirit and dedication to patient care and education through the creation of a scholarship in her name. This scholarship will allow Black students, particularly women, to obtain an outstanding medical education at BUSM and not be hindered by economic barriers.

At a time when healthcare professionals are combatting the COVID-19 pandemic and the medical inequities we face in our society, it is of the utmost importance that we ensure Black students receive the support needed to pursue a quality medical education. Dr. Crumpler's scholarship will be a vehicle to make that happen at BUSM.

Dr. Patricia J. Williams (MED'89)
Member, Dean's Advisory Board,
BU School of Medicine

In 1864, a 33-year-old woman named Rebecca Davis Lee—later Rebecca Lee Crumpler—became the first Black American woman to earn a degree in medicine. The degree was awarded by the New England Female Medical College, a pioneering institution that a decade later merged with Boston University and formed the core of Boston University's School of Medicine (BUSM).

Today, we at BUSM seek to celebrate the ambition and accomplishments of Dr. Crumpler with a scholarship in her name, which is dedicated to advancing the education of Black American students, particularly women, who choose to pursue a medical degree at BUSM. We invite you to join us in honoring her legacy.

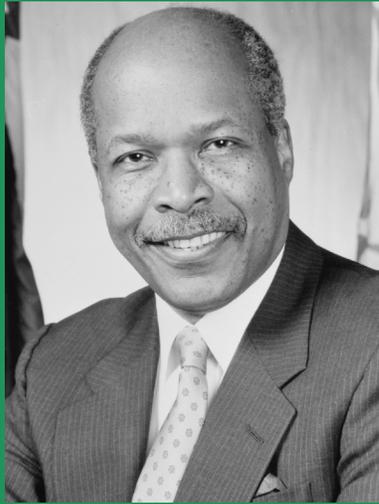
A LIFE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

In 1860, there were 54,543 physicians in the US. Only about 300 were women, and none of those women was Black.

But Rebecca had spent her early childhood with an aunt who provided skilled nursing care to her neighbors, and decided as a young adult to go into nursing herself. She greatly impressed the physicians with whom she worked, and their letters of recommendation helped open the door to medical school.

Following her graduation, the recently widowed Rebecca married Arthur Crumpler, a blacksmith who had escaped from slavery, and together they relocated to Richmond, Virginia, where Dr. Crumpler worked with the Freedmen's Bureau, created at the end of the Civil War to help recently freed enslaved people gain access to food, housing, and medical services. Although she encountered prejudice and hostility as a Black female doctor, she persisted, and soon discovered her life's mission: combating illness in women and children.

After returning to Boston in 1869, Dr. Crumpler set up a practice in the family's new home at the foot of Beacon Hill, where she practiced family medicine for a



CELEBRATING A LEGACY

Dr. Crumpler was a pioneer in the medical field as a nurse and then a physician, treating the needy, and her legacy deserves to be commemorated.

I was able to attend the BU School of Medicine thanks to scholarship support from alumni, and I want to give back, and especially help Black students with need. COVID-19 has revealed deficiencies in our healthcare system, in particular a discrepancy between the health outcomes of white and Black people, making it more important than ever to assist underrepresented minorities going into the medical field.

You can't have a strong economy and nation without a healthy population.

Dr. Louis W. Sullivan (MED'58, Hon.'90)
Member, Dean's Advisory Board,
BU School of Medicine

little over a decade, often providing free care for patients who needed it. Later, after retiring from active practice, she wrote *A Book of Medical Discourses*, published in 1883: probably the first medical text ever written by an Black American. She wrote using “as few technical terms as possible,” to help make the book’s lessons—on a host of topics including the right age to marry, breastfeeding, teething, dental hygiene, and many more—accessible. But her writing was also remarkable for what it *didn't* do. It didn't divide “health” along racial lines. It simply presented best medical practices of the day for the benefit of Black Americans and others alike.

A SCHOLARSHIP IN HER NAME

Dr. Crumpler was able to study at the Female Medical College because of a scholarship established by a Massachusetts-based merchant, who, when asked by the college if he wanted to restrict the scholarships to Massachusetts residents, said no: “Let them come from anywhere.” Dr. Crumpler had been compelled to relocate briefly to Virginia at the outbreak of the Civil War, and the scholarship enabled her to return to Massachusetts and continue her studies.

Today, the need for financial aid for BUSM students is no less acute. Annual tuition at BUSM exceeds \$64,000—a sum that is comparable to our peer schools and far less than the true cost of a full BUSM education. Even so, for students graduating from BUSM with debt in 2019 (i.e., 68 percent of the class), the average debt load was more than \$221,000.

We maximize scholarships, but most students still have to borrow. High debt loads are particularly challenging for graduates who choose careers in primary care rather than in more lucrative specialties. Also, since BUSM proactively recruits medical students with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds—representative of the communities they will go on to serve—our students’ average need is high. Black/African American students made up only 8.4 percent of applicants to medical school and 5 percent of active US physicians in 2018–2019. Financial aid is one critical way to expand access to a medical education, and the medical profession.

We look forward to honoring the memory of Dr. Crumpler with an endowed scholarship fund in her name, which will be awarded to students demonstrating financial need, with first preference for Black women and second preference for students from underrepresented communities who are Black or Hispanic/Latinx.

We invite you to help establish the Rebecca Lee Crumpler Scholarship.

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