

## wellness inside /out | local ob/gyn puts minorities on physician path



*University Hospitals physician Karen Ashby: "I've been involved in various aspects of mentoring pretty much my whole career."*

role model and an introduction to career possibilities in the medical field.

She's currently involved with the Cleveland Medical Association, an organization representing minority physicians in Northeast Ohio. One of the group's missions is to mentor young minorities who

BY TIFFANY JANSEN | PHOTO BY THOMAS SKERNIVITZ

**K**aren Ashby, MD, doesn't have children, but several of her colleagues do — and none of their kids wants to be a doctor.

It is a realization that the OB/GYN finds unsettling. Particularly in the wake of the Affordable Care Act, which is providing more and more Americans with access to healthcare.

"There just aren't enough people to take care of them," Dr. Ashby says. "Even in Cleveland, trying to find a primary care doctor who's taking new patients is tough."

The challenge lies in getting young people interested in filling the void. And it's a challenge Dr. Ashby is ready to take on. In fact, she's spent a large portion of her

career mentoring those seeking to go into the medical field and encouraging others who have perhaps not considered it a viable career option.

A full-time faculty member at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, she ran the medical student clerkship for a number of years, mentoring students in their third and fourth years as they went through their clinical rotations.

"I've been involved in various aspects of mentoring pretty much my whole career," Dr. Ashby, who also practices gynecology and obstetrics at University Hospitals in Cleveland, says.

When she first began her practice, a patient introduced her to a program for troubled girls. Her task was to serve as a

wish to go into medicine.

"We're finding that the number of minority students going into medicine is not increasing," Dr. Ashby says. "So we're having to strategize how we can get people interested in the medical field when they're younger."

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Because of the level and intensity of medical study, it's crucial that students get an early start. Taking the right classes, getting into a good school, and being acutely aware of what the job entails can turn the pursuit of a medical career from an uphill climb to an attainable goal.



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So how can we get more young people interested in going into medicine? The solution, Dr. Ashby says, lies in mentoring.

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“If you don’t have a doctor in your family and your own doctor is not a minority, I think it’s much more of a stretch to decide that you want to be in medicine,” Dr. Ashby says.

Growing up, Dr. Ashby had plenty of exposure to minorities in the medical field. Her pediatrician was a minority and her father was an orthopedic surgeon. Although she was still up in the air as to what kind of doctor she wanted to be once she got to medical school, she’d always known she was going to be a doctor.

With Dr. Ashby’s help, residents at Case have begun a program for area middle schools with the dual goals of teaching reproductive education and creating interest in the medical professions by introducing students to young physicians of all backgrounds.

“You know, I do have a good friend from medical school whose daughter is a senior,” Dr. Ashby says. “And she does want to be a doctor!”

There is still much work to be done, but thanks to the work of dedicated professionals like Dr. Ashby, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. ■

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