

Daphne Calmes, MD, MSHS

HSHPS Board Member

Interim Dean, College of Medicine

Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science



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For Dr. Daphne Calmes, MD, MSHS, the path to medicine was a gradual buildup as opposed to a singular “aha!” moment.

“It seemed to be a natural progression to be a physician,” said Dr. Calmes, Interim Dean for Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science (CDU), in Los Angeles, Calif.

Dr. Calmes witnessed and experienced health disparity as a child growing up in both the Southside of Chicago and then South Los Angeles, formerly South Central L.A.

“Having the experience of receiving care from county hospitals and community clinics - it definitely made an impression on me,” said Dr. Calmes. “It was interesting to see the differences: waiting in line for immunizations as a child at a community clinic, the large number of patients[...]that feeling of there being a difference in care for those that didn’t have insurance.”

When the family moved to California they had Medi-cal, California’s Medicaid program, where they were able to find a family physician that accepted their insurance and who was committed to providing quality care regardless of “who you were.” The experience made a lasting impression on young Dr. Calmes and she knew that she wanted to work with children sometime in her future, at the least as a science teacher for elementary school children.

It wasn’t until she was an undergraduate at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) that a fellow biology major asked her to go to a premed group. She became friends with this group, attended workshops, and grew passionate about medicine. A volunteer position at a pediatric clinic solidified one of her “burning desires to work with pediatric patients.” But it was the guidance of a mentor - a pediatrician - that pushed Dr. Calmes to make the jump and apply for medical school.

"Mentorship is something you can't underestimate," she said. "That's how I became interested in medicine. She encouraged me to apply to medical school, wrote me a letter of recommendation for medical school, and assisted me with reading my personal statement."

Seeking a mentor is one of the key things Dr. Calmes has learned throughout her medical career. It is the type of relationship that she advises future health professionals to cultivate even as the successes come and the path changes.

"You have to understand that there are different types of mentors for different phases of your career. I don't think I had a clear understanding of how different people can play different roles," said Dr. Calmes. "It's kind of like this ebb and flow where the mentorship is intense, like when applying to residency, and then you need them for another goal. It's really important to let things flow naturally and hopefully relationships will be maintained for a long time."

In June 2012, Dr. Calmes assumed her current position of Interim Dean for Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science (CDU). She has served as the Associate Dean of Medical Student Affairs for the Medical Student Education Program since 2006. As Interim Dean her priority is to create and implement a College of Medicine strategic plan that will strengthen and expand the CDU Medical Education Program, promote faculty research, reestablish graduate medical education programs, and implement a multi-campus telemedicine initiative.

"It's important for me to be a part of a mission based institution such as CDU that doesn't forget about the pipeline. 'How can we move children through that pipeline to become successful and then receive the education and medical services they deserve?'" said Dr. Calmes.

She points out that the CDU campus is located in South Los Angeles.

"I want to be a part of an institution that is about the community and meeting the needs of the community."

Dr. Calmes sees herself at CDU for as long as she can be there.