Working in partnership to address the Black Maternal Health crisis

The Duke Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology and the Duke Health Office of Government Relations are dedicated to providing excellent care to all of the communities we serve and committed to addressing maternal health disparities. We look forward to collaborative efforts with U.S. Reps. Alma Adams and Lauren Underwood, and the Black Maternal Health Caucus, to address one of the most urgent crises in the United States today: maternal mortality rates in America. Through actionable proposals to tackle persistent racial inequities in maternal outcomes, and through partnerships that effectively utilize Duke’s nationally recognized expertise and resources, the goal is an enabling stakeholders to address this crisis.

Duke Obstetrics & Gynecology and Duke Health are committed to addressing the following issues:

- Black women are **three to four times more likely** to die from pregnancy-related complications.
- Black women are **twice as likely** to lose an infant to premature death.
- The causes are complex and include coverage gaps, social determinants of health, and other factors, but **racism is a driving force**: even a Black woman with a college degree is more likely to die from giving birth than a white woman without a high school diploma.

MEET OUR TEAM

**Katrina Avery, MD**
*Professional Role at Duke*
Division Chief, Duke Health Harris & Smith Ob/Gyn

*Involvement with maternal healthcare at Duke and in the Durham community, and at the regional and/or national level*

Dr. Avery has cared for women at Duke Health Harris & Smith Ob/Gyn for more than 20 years, in addition to holding leadership roles with professional organizations and healthcare institutions. She has served on the Duke Regional Hospital Board of Trustees, as Ob/Gyn Residency Director at Duke Regional Hospital and as Ob/Gyn Department Chair at Duke Regional Hospital. Dr. Avery served as the immediate past president of the University of North Carolina Medical Alumni Association and is currently a member of the Medical Foundation of UNC Health. She is active with the Old North State Medical Society (ONSS) and the National Medical Association (NMA) – the oldest and largest Black physician organization in the U.S.

Dr. Avery is committed to serving Durham and is extensively involved in community outreach initiatives that educate women and families. She regularly presents educational talks to community groups, including yearly programs for Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and she is committed to disseminating information about health disparities. Her patients serve as a significant cohort for clinical research efforts in the Department. She dedicates herself to volunteer work, including free COVID-19 testing in the community. She is also an active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and the Triangle Park Chapter of the Links, Inc.

**Matthew D. Barber, MD, MHS**
*Professional Role at Duke*
Chair, Department of Ob/Gyn
Chief of Duke University Hospital Medical Staff
Member, Duke University School of Medicine Oversight Anti-Racism Committee

*Involvement with maternal healthcare at Duke and in the Durham community, and at the regional and/or national level*

In addition to leading the Department of Ob/Gyn, Dr. Barber serves on the Duke University School of Medicine’s Moments to Movement Oversight Anti-Racism Committee. As part of the Duke School of Medicine’s long-established commitment to anti-racism and diversity and inclusion, leadership and faculty have
been actively involved with ensuring that disparities and health equity continue to be a strategic priority.

Training a current and future healthcare workforce that is intentionally anti-racist within a broader context of social justice, advancing knowledge related to the impact of racism and racial inequities on healthcare through teaching, research and clinical missions, and utilizing expertise to develop and deploy solutions for our local, regional and national communities, are among the committee’s strategic initiatives.

**Alice Cooper, OGNP, RNC**

**Professional Role at Duke**

Vice Chair for Ambulatory Services, Department of Ob/Gyn

Medical Director, Duke Perinatal Clinic, Durham

Medical Director, PDC Access Services

**Involvement with maternal healthcare at Duke and in the Durham community, and at the regional and/or national level**

Alice is an active member of the Patient Access Collaborative, a national organization that addresses access best practices to benefit patients.

She also serves on the Board of Directors for Project Access Durham County. The agency’s mission is to improve the health of uninsured and underserved Durham County residents by providing access to an organized system of comprehensive care and collaborating with community partners to address barriers to health. Alice’s career with Duke includes more than 30 years of working both as a healthcare provider and in leadership roles. She has been an integral part of the Department, working tirelessly to ensure that health equity is prioritized.

**Ebony Harden, RD, LDN, CDE**

**Professional Role at Duke**

Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and Certified Diabetes Educator, Duke Perinatal Durham

**Involvement with maternal healthcare at Duke and in the Durham community, and at the regional and/or national level**

As a registered dietitian nutritionist, Ebony provides medical nutrition therapy to patients and their loved ones, including nutrition assessments, care planning, monitoring, education and counseling. She collaborates with the healthcare team to identify and define outcomes to address patients’ immediate and anticipated needs.

As a certified diabetes educator, helping women achieve the best care during pregnancy and supporting their efforts at excellent blood sugar control is her main focus. She strives to educate and equip patients with the

**Beverly Gray, MD**

**Professional Role at Duke**

Director, Duke Ob/Gyn Residency Program

Division Chief, Women’s Community & Population Health

Facilitator, Medical Student Year 1 & 2 Course: Cultural Determinants of Health and Health Disparities

**Involvement with maternal healthcare at Duke and in the Durham community, and at the regional and/or national level**

Dr. Gray’s passion is educating the next generation of providers in Ob/Gyn and ensuring that equitable care and education are delivered to all patients. She serves as Director of the Ob/Gyn Residency Program, which is ranked sixth in the nation.

Dr. Gray leads the Division of Women’s Community & Population Health, and is committed to initiatives that provide care to underserved women in our community, including at the Durham, Person and Franklin County Health Departments, the Lincoln Community Center, the Durham VA Medical Center, the Duke Ob/Gyn 1J Clinic and Resident Gynecology and Obstetrical patient services. The Division she leads also encompasses Global Reproductive Health (through the Duke Global Health Institute). This unified structure improves the Division’s capacity to provide high quality care to the women of our community.

Dr. Gray serves as Co-Director of the Durham County Health Department Ob/Gyn Services and is actively involved in community outreach initiatives, including Latin19 and Born in Durham, Healthy for Life, a coalition of community-based organizations, stakeholders and advocacy groups focused on perinatal equity and reduction of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality.

As a certified diabetes educator, helping women achieve the best care during pregnancy and supporting their efforts at excellent blood sugar control is her main focus. She strives to educate and equip patients with the
Confidence to control their blood sugars/weight/health through diet and exercise and adherence to taking their medications. Making sure women who have insurance but are not able to afford their needed supplies is very important to her, and she collaborates with insurance companies and companies who supply meters to provide patients with free diabetic supplies or at an affordable cost.

Ebony works with medical and nursing students, and she is a member of the American Diabetes Association.

Joyce Jiggetts, RN

**Professional Role at Duke**

Duke High Risk Obstetrics Clinic
Pregnancy Care Manager (onsite position through the Durham County Health Department)

**Involvement with maternal healthcare at Duke and in the Durham community, and at the regional and/or national level**

Joyce is one of three Pregnancy Care Managers embedded in the High Risk Obstetrics Clinic located at the Duke Perinatal Clinic in Durham. The Pregnancy Care Management program consists of registered nurses and social workers. It provides services to pregnant women enrolled in NC Medicaid statewide, and to a limited number of low income and uninsured pregnant women. Pregnancy Care Managers work in conjunction with providers to help patients have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby. They connect patients with community resources needed like medical care, transportation, food or stable housing. Referrals are also made to programs/resources including the WIC (Women Infant Children) nutritional program, childbirth classes, breastfeeding classes and family planning. Services are continued throughout the 60 day postpartum period. If more resources are needed, referrals are made to longer term programs like Care Coordination for Children.

Brenna Hughes, MD, MSc

**Professional Role at Duke**

Vice Chair, Obstetrics and Quality, Department of Ob/Gyn
Division Chief, Maternal-Fetal Medicine

**Involvement with maternal healthcare at Duke and in the Durham community, and at the regional and/or national level**

Dr. Hughes leads quality initiatives for the Department. A major component of the work she leads focuses on standardization of care in order to eliminate bias in provision of care. This work includes creating a maternal morbidity dashboard through which severe maternal outcomes are evaluated by race, ethnicity and insurance status. The goal is to use this dashboard to monitor improvement in outcomes from interventions that are employed, and then hopefully track a narrowing of the disparities seen in outcomes.

Dr. Hughes also has been selected to join The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine’s Board of Directors for the 2021-2023 term.

Maria Small, MD, MPH

**Professional Role at Duke**

Faculty, Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine

**Involvement with maternal healthcare at Duke and in the Durham community, and at the regional and/or national level**

As a maternal-fetal medicine specialist, Dr. Small is extensively involved in championing education and delivery of care to at-risk populations in the Durham community and beyond. She serves as Medical Director for the Durham County Health Department’s Division of Women’s Health Services.

She dedicates her time to collaborative efforts with the Durham Academy of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy (DAMDP), the Old North State Medical Society (ONSS) and local and state organizations associated with the National Medical Association (NMA) – the oldest and largest Black physician organization in the U.S.

Dr. Small serves as Co-President of the DAMDP and as the site coordinator for its ONSS/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) supported COVID-19 testing in Durham. She is active in both Latin19 and organizations focused on addressing COVID-19 in communities of color in Durham and throughout NC.

Dr. Small is the Chair of the North Carolina Maternal Mortality Review Committee and is Co-Founder and Co-Chair of Born in Durham, Healthy For Life, a coalition of community-based organizations, stakeholders and advocacy groups focused on perinatal equity and reduction of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality.
Dr. Small has been appointed to the Duke University School of Medicine Faculty Anti-Racism Committee, which is working to uncover DUSOM’s priorities and opportunities related to enhancing racial diversity and equity among faculty, and enhancing the career development and satisfaction of the School’s underrepresented in medicine faculty.

She also serves on the Board of Directors of Frontier Nursing University, in Versailles, Kentucky. The university is a top-rated university that educates advanced practice nurses, including nurse-midwives, to care for patients in underserved areas of all 50 states.

Geeta Swamy, MD

Professional Role at Duke
Vice Chair, Research and Faculty Development, Department of Ob/Gyn
Vice Dean for Scientific Integrity, Associate Vice President for Research, Duke University

Involvement with maternal healthcare at Duke and in the Durham community, and at the regional and/or national level

Dr. Swamy has active roles in the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), including the Immunization, Infectious Disease, and Public Health Preparedness Work Group. She is a member of the National Vaccine Advisory Committee (Department of Health and Human Services) and the Vaccines & Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC, FDA).

An advocate for including pregnant and lactating women in clinical trials/testing new vaccines or treatments for COVID-19, Dr. Swamy dedicates much of her time to research in this area. She is co-Principal Investigator for the NIH-NIAID Vaccine Treatment and Evaluation (VTEU) and CDC-funded Clinical Immunization Safety Assessment Project and for a current COVID-19 vaccine trial (Pfizer/BioNTech).

Additionally, Dr. Swamy is Co-Investigator on a planned clinical trial for a SARS-COV-2 (COVID-19) vaccine through the COVID-19 Prevention Network (COVPN).

Sarahn Wheeler, MD

Professional Role at Duke
Faculty, Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Director, Duke Ob/Gyn Diversity & Inclusion

Involvement with maternal healthcare at Duke and in the Durham community, and at the regional and/or national level

Dr. Wheeler is a practicing maternal-fetal medicine specialist and is an active researcher focused on eliminating race disparities in preterm birth. She has received funding via the Duke Population Health Improvement Award and the Duke REACH Equity Center Career Development Award, and she is a current KL2 scholar.

As Director of Diversity and Inclusion, she leads multiple projects geared toward maintaining an inclusive environment through which the Department can thrive. She oversees initiatives, including department-wide bystander, implicit bias and sexual/gender diversity training. She also works with local organizations to develop and maintain community relationships.

In addition to her service at Duke, Dr. Wheeler is active on the state and national levels. She was selected to serve on the North Carolina Institute of Medicine Maternal Health Task Force. She is the Vice Chair of the Society of Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM) Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

Dr. Wheeler is also the director for a postgraduate course focused on maternal health disparities that will be offered at the upcoming SMFM national meeting in January 2021.