

UW Health: Physician reflects on improving equity in healthcare through her work with patients, students and trainees

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MADISON, Wis. – During Black History Month, this physician is thinking about how to influence and improve equity in healthcare at every stage.

Dr. Jacqueline Peebles, an obstetrics and gynecology physician at UW Health and clinical associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health, works with many kinds of patients, primarily those with gynecological concerns or those who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

“I love working with patients through the joys and challenges that come with a new baby,” Peebles said. “For example, breastfeeding can be difficult for many, but it has so many health benefits for mother and baby, so I work to support new mothers to breastfeed when possible.”

It is also an opportunity to reduce racial disparities. According to Peebles, Black mothers breastfeed at much lower rates than non-Hispanic white mothers, so she is focused on increasing rates of breastfeeding for mothers of color.

Plus, breastfeeding is widely recognized as a modifiable risk factor for breast cancer, and Black women experience disproportionately higher rates of aggressive types of breast cancer. So, when she is working with patients on breastfeeding, she aims to both improve immediate health outcomes and reduce other disparities for Black women over time.

Peebles recently joined the Maternal Child Health Steering Group, which is designed to improve Black maternal and infant health outcomes.

“I’m honored to be part of a group specifically focused on better health outcomes for Black moms and reducing the tragic and disproportionate Black infant mortality rates in Wisconsin,” Peebles said.

This work includes using telehealth to improve postpartum care for Black mothers, working with doulas to increase support for Black people during and after pregnancy, increasing access to social support services and more.

Peebles is also part of the School of Medicine and Public Health’s Building Equitable Access to Mentorship (BEAM) Program, which is an evidence-based program that pairs faculty mentors with first-year medical students from backgrounds historically underrepresented in medicine.

“I don’t think anyone who goes through medical school can make it without good mentors,” Peebles said. “BEAM creates not only an amazing professional opportunity for mentors and mentees, but by supporting our students through their medical education, we increase representation in medicine, and that representation matters a lot.”

A passionate educator, Peebles also serves as the associate residency program director at UW Health, supporting early-career residents through their hands-on training in obstetrics and gynecology as they prepare for board exams and licensing.

“It is so rewarding to see them learn and grow and hopefully become even better than the physicians who came before them,” Peebles said.

For Black History Month, Peebles reflects on the future of healthcare professionals.

“When I think about young Black people considering a career in medicine, I say go for it,” she said. “Think about what you have a passion for, because the more folks we have doing this work the better it will be for all of healthcare.”

A pre-recorded interview with Peebles is available.