

KECIA GAITHER, MD '90

MATERNAL FETAL SPECIALIST

Fighting Healthcare Disparities

In the United States, the maternal mortality rate is 3.5 higher for black women than white women, largely because of disparities in maternal care.

“There exists a pandemic of perinatal morbidity and mortality among pregnant black women,” says Kecia Gaither, MD '90, director of perinatal services at NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln in the Bronx. “There needs to be an obviation of biases, institutional and individual racism, and a recognition that not listening to your patients kills. It’s a national crisis that can be reckoned with by a recognition and attention to patterns of behavior.”

The Bronx has the highest perinatal morbidity and mortality in New York, a statistic Gaither sees daily in her work caring for primarily underserved, low-income, immigrant patients from African diaspora and Latinx countries. Her mission is to offer exemplary prenatal care to all women, regardless of circumstance.

Gaither’s patients are considered high-risk in their pregnancies because of other health complications, such as diabetes, hypertension, HIV/AIDS, obesity, or carrying multiples. “I’m trained to take care of medical conditions in pregnancy that general obstetricians are not,” says Gaither, who is double board-certified in OB/GYN and maternal fetal medicine. “I do not see the same thing every day. My work entails genetics issues, medical surgical issues, fetal structural issues and anomalies, and research. There are a lot of nuances and I’m constantly stimulated. I love what I do.”

Gaither, who also has an academic appointment as associate professor of clinical obstetrics and gynecology with Weill Cornell Medicine, does not routinely deliver babies. “If I have a case that’s weird or unusual, I will scrub in,” she says. “Otherwise, my focus is keeping the mother and fetus healthy up to delivery.”

Gaither became interested in the OB/GYN subspecialty as a medical student at Upstate, where she first thought she would be a pediatrician. “When I did my



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pediatrics rotation, they put me on the oncology service, which was terribly depressing,” she recalls. “My next rotation was OB/GYN, where I rotated with the maternal-fetal fellow, Shiraz Sunderji, MD. I absolutely loved it and knew then and there that’s what I wanted to do.”

Gaither completed her OB/GYN residency at Riverside Regional Medical Center, a subsidiary of Medical College of Virginia, followed by a maternal fetal medicine fellowship at Rutgers University.

During the course of her career, Gaither has developed a strong focus on public health. “I see a lot of cardiac disease in my patients, so we’ve instituted a program to identify risk factors early

on,” she says. “This is something I would like to develop nationally, beyond just a hospital-based program.”

In 2006, Gaither earned an MPH in Health Policy and Management from Columbia University, and in May 2022, completed a dual MS/MBA from Cornell University in healthcare policy and research/healthcare leadership. “I’m very interested in advocacy. I pursued the MBA specifically because I wanted to be more financially savvy as to healthcare, particularly navigating in a demographic that is underserved and challenged financially, to be able to provide the best care and the best financial methodology possible,” she says.

Increasingly, Gaither is working to impact healthcare from a population perspective, efforts that range from speaking with the media and elected officials on women’s health issues to serving as liaison to the Association of Black Cardiologists to promote critical perinatal initiatives and access to prenatal care. In 2011, she served as an appointee of New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to the HIV Planning Council of New York. And she was recently elected as a board member of the United Nations Association, where she hopes to focus on women’s health globally.

“The disparities in U.S. healthcare show up in the patients I see every day,” she says. “There is a lot of work to be done.”