

ROLE MODEL

Evelyn Mensah

The consultant ophthalmologist talks to **Kathy Oxtoby** about her love of combining medicine with surgery and how her childhood equipped her for the specialty

NOMINATED BY SARAH ANN FILSON

"I met Evelyn Mensah through our work on improving uptake of covid-19 vaccines within the trust. She was instrumental in setting up and leading regular webinars with employees who had ongoing concerns about the vaccine.

"I was struck by her passion, candour, and willingness to use her own time and initiative to help others. I was also inspired by seeing a fellow female black doctor leading a department within the trust.

"Eve has become a trusted mentor and support to me and many other young trainees. She is always willing to speak up for her colleagues and patients.

"I feel fortunate to have met her during my training, and know she will continue to be a support for me throughout my career."

Sarah Ann Filson is an infectious diseases and microbiology specialist doctor who is currently on an out of programme experience at Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health

NOMINATE A ROLE MODEL

To nominate someone who has been a role model during your medical career, send their name, job title, and the reason for your nomination to awaters@bmj.com

I love sharing my knowledge with trainees and I learn from them too



RICHARD H SMITH

From an early age, consultant ophthalmologist Evelyn Mensah received training that would equip her well to carry out surgical procedures.

"My mother was a pattern cutter who made clothes for friends and family. One of my jobs as a child was to sew on buttons," she says.

Years later that need for deftness and precision was evident when as a house officer she assisted breast surgeon Margaret Ghilchik, who complimented her on her "extremely neat" suturing. "She told me I had beautiful surgeon's hands," says Mensah.

Ghilchik also inspired her choice of specialty. "I didn't want to be a surgeon—I felt the hours weren't conducive to family life. But then Margaret said, 'What about eye surgery?' It was a light bulb moment. That's when I decided to pursue ophthalmology."

"I love the combination of medicine and surgery," says Mensah, who works at the ophthalmology department at Central Middlesex Hospital in London. A cataract specialist, she says, "It's a privilege and pleasure doing this procedure, because it requires a lot of confidence and trust in me from patients." She reassures patients who are worried, plays them "soothing jazz," and after surgery "they talk about the pleasurable experience of seeing so many wonderful colours."

Her main role model, ophthalmologist Gilli Vafidis, prompted her to choose the subspecialty. "I try to emulate her compassion, care, and leadership—and it's because of her I'm so committed to teaching," she says.

In 2018 Mensah was awarded a certificate in outstanding training by Health Education England. "I love sharing my knowledge with trainees and I learn from them too," she says. She also shares with her trainees her mantra for life: Believe in yourself, don't listen to naysayers, and never take no for an answer.

Describing herself as a "Geordie Ghanaian" Mensah was born and grew up in Newcastle upon

Tyne after her parents emigrated in the 1960s. After having her tonsils removed aged five, she decided to become a doctor. "I loved being in hospital. I'm probably one of the few children to have actually cried when it was time to leave."

Encouraged by supportive parents, who she says gave her a foundation of self-belief, Mensah became the first in her family to go to university, attending St Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, in 1986. After graduating in 1991, and several years of house officer jobs, Mensah was accepted onto the Moorfields Training programme in 2001. In 2006 she qualified as a consultant, and after being a locum at Central Middlesex Hospital she was given a substantive post in 2011 and made clinical lead for the ophthalmology department in 2018.

Mensah is a Workforce Race Equality Standard expert for the trust. "I applied to the programme, because I wanted to have the tools, vocabulary, and training to tackle inequalities," she says. She is also the trust's the lead for its covid vaccination advocates, giving colleagues advice and support.

She aims to continue with her anti-racism work, and passionately believes that "there should be no difference between the experiences of my ethnic minority and non-ethnic minority colleagues, and no difference in the care that any of our patients receive within the NHS."

She is also passionate about her role as medical retinal lead for a training programme offering sub-specialist training for ophthalmologists in West Africa—a project coordinated between Moorfields and the Ophthalmology Faculty of the West African College of Surgeons. Mensah has visited Ghana to share her knowledge and help deliver courses she has written and developed.

Outside work, Mensah creates jewellery. She is a member of the Gemmological Institute of America, has taken a diamond grading course, and designs and makes jewellery for friends and family. "I love things that sparkle," she says.

Kathy Oxtoby, London

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