

2019 History Maker at Home: Dr. Nathan Chomilo

By Shanae Phillips, Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights

Dr. Nathan Chomilo is the doctor everyone wishes they had as a child and the provider we all hope for as an adult. With his affable demeanor and obvious love for his work, it's not hard to figure out why Mpls.St.Paul Magazine featured him in their Top Doctors: Rising Stars edition in 2018. "Working with kids was always the driver for me going into medicine," said Dr. Chomilo in an [interview for the award](#). "I also loved figuring out what was going on in adult patients and the complexity their care could present."

Given his family history, it's no surprise Dr. Chomilo developed a love for medicine. "My dad is a pharmacist and my mom is a nurse, so I was always around medicine. My dad immigrated here from Cameroon where he had earned a nursing degree. He intended to go to medical school in the U.S. but received a scholarship to attend pharmacy school instead."

Going back even further, Dr. Chomilo talks about his grandma who was also a nurse.

"There was always a lot of talk about medicine growing up, and there was a lot of talk about how physicians can be leaders in their community." Of course, like all great doctors, Dr. Chomilo fell in love with the academic side of his profession, as well. "When I got to high school, I just really loved biology and science, so this was a combination of getting to learn all these fascinating things about human health while also being able to impact my community."

As both a pediatrician and doctor of internal medicine, Dr. Chomilo chose a unique career path when he decided to combine these two specialties. "Honestly, these were the two parts of my residency training that were the most joyful and engaging to me." He's also one of the founding members of [Minnesota Doctors for Health Equity](#), which is a statewide organization composed of physicians who are committed to working toward health equity for all Minnesotans.

Despite his many accomplishments, however, what sets Dr. Chomilo apart is his current work as an advocate. He's interested specifically in the impacts that early childhood intervention and healthcare access have on the long-term prospects of children and how physicians and health systems can address racial and health equity.

Most recently, Dr. Chomilo was [featured locally](#) for his work as Medical Director of the non-profit [Reach Out and Read](#), which aims to help children succeed by integrating books into their pediatric care. "It's a clinic-based early literacy program delivered by physicians. When you bring your child in for their checkup, they also get a book." Dr. Chomilo goes on to explain, "We make sure the books are developmentally appropriate, and we try to match the material with whatever language is spoken at home." The goal is to have physicians impart on families the importance of reading and how this can improve the overall success of each child. "This program has been shown to increase how often parents read aloud to their children," says Dr. Chomilo. "It also supports language development and school readiness."

Another reason he believes this model is so successful is because doctors are meeting parents where they are – literally. "At least 90 percent of children will see a primary care provider within their first year of life, so people are going to see a doctor already. They don't have to fill out any forms or apply for anything to get access to this information." He also talks about the significance of this message coming from a doctor. "It's that trusted provider, that relationship you have with your pediatrician and family doctor. You really trust that person to give your child the best start possible."

When asked about the importance of this type of work, Dr. Chomilo points out, "There's all this talk of seeing 'gaps' among children, and we see some of these gaps beginning to develop as early as age 2, so it's difficult to find programs that begin working earlier and earlier. It's vital to support programs that have the ability to start early and



help turn the tide for children of color and children from low-income households.”

Dr. Chomilo received a Zoology degree from Miami University (Oxford, OH) and graduated from the University of Minnesota Medical School. He completed his combined residency in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics at the University of Minnesota and was the Pediatric Chief Resident at the University of Minnesota Children's Hospital. He's a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Early Childhood and Section on Minority Health, Equity & Inclusion, is one of the Early Childhood Champions for the MN chapter of the AAP, is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Minnesota Medical School where he's also a clinic preceptor and member of the school's Admissions Committee. Dr. Chomilo has also been appointed to the Governor's Early Learning Council and is the Vice-President of Minnesota Doctors for Health Equity. His advocacy work has been recognized by Reach Out and Read National, which awarded him the 2018 Medical Champion Achievement Award. Dr. Chomilo lives in Minneapolis with his wife and son.

Legacy History Maker: Dr. Alexa Canady



Dr. Alexa Canady is another outstanding physician with ties to Minnesota. Born in Lansing, Michigan in 1950, Dr. Canady grew up to attend the University of Michigan where she earned a B.S. in Zoology in 1971 and a medical degree in 1975. Upon graduation, she completed a year-long surgical internship at Yale New Haven Hospital in Connecticut.

Following her internship, Dr. Canady moved back to the Midwest where she was accepted as a resident at the University of Minnesota. It was here she made history, becoming the first African American woman neurosurgery resident in the United States. After completing her residency in 1981, she became the nation's first female African American neurosurgeon. In 1984, she was the first African American woman to be certified by the American Board of Neurological Surgery.

Dr. Canady specialized in pediatric neurosurgery and practiced at several well-known medical institutions throughout her career. Most notably, at the age of 36, she became chief of neurosurgery at the Children's Hospital of Michigan. She served in this role for 14 years until her retirement in 2001. Under her leadership, the department gained national recognition and remains one of top-ranked pediatric neurosurgery programs in the country.

Dr. Canady has been honored with numerous awards and recognitions, including being inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in 1989. She was also the recipient of the American Medical Women's Association President's Award in 1993.