

Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation
Vital Voices — Season 3, Episode 7
Interview with Lanre Falusi

Holly J. Humphrey, MD, MACP (HJH):

Welcome back to [Vital Voices](#), a podcast from the [Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation](#). I am Dr. Holly Humphrey, president of the Foundation. Our third season of Vital Voices focuses on the [2023 cohort of Macy Faculty Scholars](#), six individuals chosen to participate in our two-year [Macy Faculty Scholars](#) career development program because of their demonstrated potential as future leaders in medical or nursing education. I am delighted to have the opportunity to share our Scholars' stories with you as I think you are going to find their work to advance health professions education, and their own personal experiences and perspectives, to be inspiring.

Today's interview is with [Dr. Lanre Falusi](#), an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences. In both her scholarship and administrative work, Dr. Falusi focuses largely on advocacy. She is Medical Director of Advocacy Education in the Child Health Advocacy Institute of Children's National Hospital, and she directs the Children's National LAUnCH Track, which trains pediatric residents to become leaders in advocacy and community healthcare delivery. Dr. Falusi is herself an advocate, as she has spoken in Congress and in the media on topics ranging from poverty to immigrant health to anti-racism.

As a Macy Faculty Scholar, Dr. Falusi will create and implement a tool to gather feedback from patients and their families on how well trainees address the social determinants of health during a clinical encounter. I suspect we are in for a dynamic conversation, as Dr. Falusi is also co-host of her own podcast. As a doctor and mother of three daughters, Dr. Falusi shares stories and insights on parenting and health in her podcast, [Health and Homes with the Hippocratic Hosts](#). And now, here's my conversation with Dr. Lanre Falusi.

Holly J. Humphrey, MD, MACP (HJH):

Lanre, thank you so much for joining me today. With three young children at home and a busy professional life, I appreciate that you are taking time away from your many other obligations to chat with me.

Lanre Falusi, MD, MEd (LF):

Oh, thank you, Holly. It's such a privilege to be here.

HJH:

Okay. So, in reviewing your application to the Macy Faculty Scholars Program, our National Advisory Committee was very impressed by the depth and breadth of your advocacy work, something that I alluded to during the introduction to today's episode. So, can we begin with you sharing with our listeners how you build advocacy into your career as a physician and as a medical educator?

LF:

Sure. I think I'll start by saying that I think physicians are natural advocates. For me, it began in the seven years that I spent in community health, working at a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). I was seeing every day how policies were impacting the kids and families that I saw in a very real way. Everything from the quality of their schools, to where grocery stores were built, to whether the child's mom or dad might be picked up by immigration officials and deported the next day. These are things that were on my patients' minds. And I could keep writing those prescriptions for asthma inhalers and

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antibiotics for ear infections and talking about eating healthy and exercising every day, but really none of that mattered if those social drivers weren't being addressed.

So, over time, I became more involved in professional and advocacy organizations on a local and national level, and then also tried to advocate for ways to address these issues within our own health center. But it became clear to me that, thankfully, I was definitely not alone in that work, as so many physician advocates have come before me. But most of us, I felt like, were learning these skills as we went along, and we certainly didn't have any formal training in advocacy during medical school or even residency. And it's really that that drew me back to the clinician educator world. So, I returned back to Children's National, back to the academic health center about seven years ago with the goal of helping to train the next generation of pediatricians, and really, anyone else who will listen so that they're prepared to jump into this world of advocacy as soon as they graduate and not sort of trying to learn it on the fly, as so many of us did earlier on in our careers.

So, now what that looks like is trying to build community partnerships so that our residents and our students are learning from the true experts, those who are growing community-based programs to address food insecurity or housing insecurity or other issues that we see in our populations. It also, looks like working with our colleagues in our hospital's government affairs department or the American Academy of Pediatrics, other advocacy organizations for opportunities to meet with legislators and to deliver testimony. And I'll say I am constantly impressed with the passion and the drive and even the expertise that our trainees showcase, and that really gives me hope for the future in this world that we're living in.

HJH:

Boy, I really agree with you on that. The passion among the next generation is truly inspiring to me. And I am sure that there are many who are listening who would be interested, literally, to follow in your footsteps. Do you have any specific advice for future physicians who are interested in incorporating advocacy in their own future practice?

LF:

The first thing I would say is to really sharpen your listening skills. I think we often think about advocacy as speaking up and speaking out, but really, the first step, I found, is to close the mouth and open the ears and listen. Listen to our patients, have those community conversations, listen or read those credible news sources, really understand what is happening. As advocates, we often think that we're elevating those voices, which we are. We're elevating the voices of those who don't have the privilege to be invited to speak in the halls of Congress or to develop a grant-funded program. But we can't do any of that authentically until we truly listen and really aim to understand the day-to-day lives of the people that we're advocating with. So, that's one.

Secondly, I would say focus on your passion. That might be the thing that frustrates you the most in clinic or in the hospital, or what your patients tell you that they worry about, what barriers they're facing, what topics might be exciting you. For me, I find that those things which are around child poverty, immigrant health, they keep me fueled and that helps reduce the burnout. Advocacy is a marathon, not a sprint. If you maintain that excitement and eagerness to really address that thing that you're passionate about, I think that helps to stave off burnout.

And the third thing I'll say is to join forces. I'm using all these sports metaphors, even though I don't really know that much about sports, but I'd say advocacy is a team sport. There is really strength in numbers, and that was very true to me as I jumped into advocacy. Again, first working at the FQHC and

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then joining into our national organizations and seeing that strength in numbers. It was always powerful for me to say, "I'm representing this organization that represents over 60,000 pediatricians," or "I'm representing my institution that cares for patients in this community," or working side by side with folks as we are seeking grant opportunities or giving community education or that sort of thing. So, there's really that strength in numbers, the diversity in the voices. It also just makes it more fun, I think, too, as we're working with people who are those kindred spirits in the world of advocacy. So that would be my advice. Listen, focus on your passion, and really do it with others.

HJH:

Well, that is great advice. Some very practical tips. I want to switch gears for a minute and invite you to share a little bit about what brought you to the Macy Faculty Scholars Program. What made you decide to apply?

LF:

I was really thrilled to be able to apply and to even learn about the program. It seemed like such a unique opportunity to both learn and contribute to health professions education far along in my career that I could take what I've done and take it a step further, but then also be in this phase of still learning and having the time to do that. I was also excited that I'd be surrounded by a community of Scholars with my cohort who I've gotten to know really well over the last several months, and the National Advisory Committee of experts, many of whom are legends in health professions education, which has been really fantastic. And also, just the opportunity to have the time and funding to work on a project, which has been really great. And I've started working on this project that I and others have talked about for a few years, but just didn't have the infrastructure to make it happen.

So, the Macy Foundation has really allowed us to start to build up, again, this idea that was just an idea for so long, but now is becoming much more tangible. And for me, the project just brings together my love of community engagement and medical education so that we're working with community partners doing interviews and focus groups with the goal of developing a way to get feedback from our patients or their parents, in my case as a pediatrician, so that we better understand what their experiences are as we're discussing and addressing social drivers of health in a clinic visit. And the ultimate goal of that is to look back at our curricula and say, "We have this great feedback from families, and we got that feedback in a way that they wanted to give the feedback. So, now what can we do better within our curricula to better meet their needs so that as we're teaching our residents and our students, we're doing it in a way that's really relevant to our families that we're caring for?"

HJH:

Thank you for sharing all of that. I feel like we got a sense both of why you decided to apply to the program, as well as the project that you're working on. So, you're about halfway through your first year of the program, and I'm wondering about your expectations. Can you think back to the time when you were putting together your application to the present, knowing you still have some runway ahead of you in terms of completing the program—how have your expectations aligned with reality?

LF:

It has been phenomenal so far, Holly. From the Annual Meeting in June, getting to meet my cohort in person, getting to meet the current Scholars, former Macy Scholars, so inspiring. I think it was a great launching pad to thinking about how we bring together all of these factors into medical education—our

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own identities and leadership and how we interact with others and how we bring together teams to work on these initiatives. And it's also given me the time, as I mentioned, to start having those meetings. I'm meeting with a community leader who's working closely with me on this project. We're growing a team of other faculty and residents and students to help to dig into the literature.

So, I'm really excited about where the project will go and the impact that we'll make. And then, on a personal level, I think it has definitely aligned with my expectations in that I am just taking the time to sit and read some articles and better understand what it is and the theory behind what we're trying to do, which is something that I think we all aim to do, but the push is always just to do it, do it and evaluate it, and then continue to move on. But this has been a nice way to pause and really take a step back and make sure that we truly understand what it is that we're doing when we're talking about assessment tools and community engagement and all of that. So, it's been really fantastic so far.

HJH:

Well, thank you for that. And it makes me curious about ultimately, given your work as a pediatrician, a medical educator, an advocate, how are you hoping that all of this work will ultimately impact medical education broadly?

LF:

First, I would love for the impact to be seen as a product of teamwork. I'm so fortunate to work with some amazing, dedicated, talented people in our training program, in our advocacy institute, in our community partnerships, in our national organizations, so that's been phenomenal. And I hope that the lasting impact really is a transformation on how in medical education we regard individuals, whether they're patients or community members, and communities and populations at large. We often talk about our patients as cases, or we have numbers and data around health disparities and health inequity. But what I'm really hoping is that we move further and really think of our patients and communities as partners in curriculum development and curriculum assessment and curriculum improvement. And hoping to do that hand in hand with community organizations and doing co-creation and inclusion, as we think about how we build our training—and hoping to do this in a creative way.

The way that we typically work on medical education, create curricula, is very structured, which I love. But at times we have to kind of massage and flip that around a little bit to think about, "Wait, it may not be that a community organization—that a thought like this would make sense to them." There are other paradigms, other frameworks to go about creating a new program or a new project. So, that's part of the fun for me. And taking what we know about Kirkpatrick levels and the Kern six-step model, and then meeting with a community organization who's thinking about social justice and human-centered design and bringing all of those together. So, that's my hope, that over time we really try to branch out and become even more inclusive of how others, who are really the end users of our education—patients and communities—how they can impact what we do within the halls of our academic world.

HJH:

Oh, that's beautifully said. It's such a pleasure to talk with you. I just could listen for longer, but I do need to wrap things up for today and want to thank you so much for joining me on the Macy Foundation's podcast. Your comments are just a powerful reminder to all of us of the responsibility and the privilege that we have as physicians in caring for our patients, their families, our communities, and you are right there doing that on the front lines, so to speak, and in a way that is inspiring to so many.

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I am also very struck by your energy and your willingness to juggle many priorities, which often compete with one another, something that I know is especially challenging for physicians with young children at home, and perhaps especially challenging for mothers who work as physicians. So, you are an absolute inspiration and we cannot wait to see what the future holds for you and your patients and your family. Thanks a lot, Lanre.

LF:

Holly, thank you so much. This was such a pleasure and always an honor to talk with you.

HJH:

Thank you for listening, and we hope you'll share this conversation with others. You can find this and all episodes of the Vital Voices Podcast on the [Macy Foundation website](#). We hope you will subscribe to the series so that you won't miss other conversations with the 2023 Scholars.

We are now accepting applications for the [2025 cohort of Macy Faculty Scholars](#). You can learn more, and apply, via our website, www.macyfoundation.org. The application portal will close on September 15th, 2024.